RURAL WOMEN--MEXICO'S 'COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE'?:
LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING
IN TWO PUEBLA EJIDOS

by

Kerry Lynne Preibisch
B.A., Simon Fraser University

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RURAL WOMEN - MEXICO'S "COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE": LIVED

EXPERIENCES OF ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING IN TWO PUEBLA EJIDOS.

Author:

(signature)

Kerry Preibisch

(name)

July 22, 1996

(date)
APPROVAL

Name: Kerry Preibisch
Degree: Master of Arts
Title: Rural Women--Mexico's Comparative Advantage"? Lived Experiences of Economic Restructuring in Two Puebla Ejidos

Examining Committee:
Acting Chair: Rita De Grandis
Associate Professor, SLAS

Senior Supervisor: Marilyn Gates
Associate Professor, SLAS

Gerardo Otero
Supervisor
Associate Professor, SLAS

Cathy Nesmith
Assistant Professor Geography
External Examiner

Date Approved: July 18, 1996
ABSTRACT

Since Mexico’s neoliberal economic restructuring began, the agricultural sector has been subject to a number of far-reaching reforms. This thesis focuses on Mexican agricultural policy and the lived realities of rural women in two communities during the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). Recent research has called for an examination of state initiatives to transform the agricultural sector in terms of gender, pointing out that rural women are experiencing some of the most negative consequences of growing economic and social inequality. These have included the feminization of subsistence agriculture, as women farmers compensate for male emigration, or the feminization of rural labour markets with the growth of export agriculture seeking ‘cheap’ labour as their comparative advantage in the world market.

To shed light on the local realities often ignored in macro-level analysis, research was carried out in two rural communities in the State of Puebla: one located in a region where basic grains are cultivated for mainly subsistence needs and the other in an area geared to commercial agriculture. This contrast provides sketches of the peasant production discouraged by the Government of Mexico as no longer “competitive” (basic grains) and the “comparative advantage” alternative posed (higher value crops reliant on cheap labour). The ethnographic field research involved participant observation techniques, the completion of questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with a group of residents from each community.

This thesis contributes to research on gender and the current phase of restructuring, not only to measure differential impacts for men and women, but to expose increasing gender inequality as a concomitant to restructuring. A central theoretical concern, thus, is the role of gender in the organization of production and labour for capital accumulation in those regions where a peasantry, articulated to meet the needs of capital, persists. Key areas for discussion include the intensification of rural women’s work load accompanying rising emigration to national and international labour markets, the impact of the growth of export floriculture on the lives of the women workers, and diverse rural responses to changes in agrarian policy under neoliberalism.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family,
whose love and support made this project possible,
to Gramma, for her own stories of the countryside,
y a Gustavo, por su inspiración y amor.
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PEASANT SOCIETIES, ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING, &
THE DYNAMICS OF GENDER

As neoliberal policies became further installed in most Latin American countries following the debt crisis of the 1980s, Mexico was often held up by proponents of economic liberalism as a shining example of 'development' for the rest of the region. Events of the last few years, however, are forcing a re-examination of the neoliberal experiment as poverty and its associated social ills have deepened and become more generalized throughout Mexico. This scenario has been especially true for the countryside, where drastic reforms to government agricultural policy have greatly transformed the social landscape. Recent research in this area has called for a recognition of gender differences in the ways restructuring is experienced, pointing out that rural women are faced with some of the most negative consequences of growing economic and social inequality. The most current areas of research, to which this thesis contributes, examine the current phase of restructuring and the role of gender in this process not only to measure differential impacts for men and women, but also to expose gender differences as a concomitant to restructuring.

Rural gender studies have also made important steps to include local models of analysis and to explore the micro-realities that are often ignored by macro-biased knowledge construction. Local level ethnographies that prioritize gender, attempt to include women's voices by privileging oral traditions and the spaces of everyday life. This thesis focuses on Mexican agricultural policy and the lived realities of women in two rural communities during the current phase of economic restructuring (1988-1994). It is argued that inequalities based on gender facilitate the cheapening of labour, which is integral to current economic restructuring both within Mexico and on a global scale, and sketches of everyday life in the current climate are provided.
1.1 **Rural Women -- Mexico's 'Comparative Advantage'?**

In the wake of the debt crisis that swept across Latin America in the 1980s, most countries abandoned previous development models and began to chart their economies according to free-trade, outward-oriented models of development. Mexico became the first country in the Latin American region to implement a free trade agreement (North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA) with the North American countries on January 1, 1994. Three months later, Mexico joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a 25 member organization of wealthier nations advocating economic liberalism. It appeared that, after some ten hard years of economic adjustment, Mexico had achieved First-World status in the global market.

The illusion of a stable, healthy economy did not last for long. Two key events revealed the reality behind Mexico's supposed economic health, exposing the country as a Third World nation in emperor's clothes. The first major event was the outbreak of the indigenous, peasant-based rebellion in the state of Chiapas timed to coincide with the date NAFTA came into effect. The second was the drastic, over-due currency devaluation in December 1994 which crippled the already weak economy. Export-oriented industrialization had become increasingly reliant on imports, creating a huge trade deficit that had been financed by highly volatile portfolio capital (Otero, 1996). Generalized bankruptcy in various sectors, unemployment, sky-rocketing inflation, and decreased real wages led to rising social unrest and increased civil militancy even outside Chiapas.

Rather than being grounded in strategic economic policies, Mexico's primary 'comparative advantage' within the global economy is based on profound social inequities which create and institutionalize cheap labour. As the Chiapas crisis so clearly highlighted, low wage levels that have fueled industrialization and economic growth in Mexico have been maintained in part through "the provision of cheap food and the exploitation of the peasantry and urban working class" (Escobar, 1995:128). Alain de Janvry (1981) has termed this situation as 'functional dualism', whereby a 'modern', capitalized sector exists
alongside a 'backward' sector, providing cheap food and labour for the former. In the
countryside, this is expressed in the coexistence of two apparently distinct agricultural
sectors (capitalist and subsistence) which are in actuality strongly articulated with one
another (Harris, 1978). The peasant sector is largely concentrated in ejidos, a community-
based system of usufruct land tenure that was the basic unit in Mexico's agrarian reform
project following the Revolution (1910-1920), and the minifundio (highly fragmented)
holdings of the private property sector.¹

In the rural medium, gender, ethnicity and age are variables integral to social
differentiation on the basis of class that serve as a means to create cheap labour. In terms
of gender, throughout the twentieth century state policies toward the countryside have
treated women peasants differentially than their male counterparts, exacerbating rural
women's subordination within the famil; by placing them at a structural disadvantage
(Aranda, 1988; Deere, 1985; Robles et. al, 1993; Velázquez, 1992).² The ways in which
gender subordination facilitates capital accumulation is apparent in several phenomena
present in the countryside. On the one hand, in those areas where heavy (male) emigration
has occurred in response to growing impoverishment (most notably in communities
dedicated to subsistence production of basic grains) women have compensated for
migrants' absences by intensifying their role in direct agricultural production, in addition to
their usual productive and reproductive burdens. High rates of male emigration can thus
be seen as linked to increased reliance on women's labour by capital as facilitated by the

¹The ejido, a community-based system of land tenure, was the basic unit in Mexico's agrarian reform
project. An ejido is a land grant to a community, made up of common lands and individual parcels. Prior
to new legislation in 1992, the government protected ejido lands within the community from the market.
Ejido lands were inalienable. They could not be bought, sold, or rented—although this did occur. The
ejidos were subject to a great deal of state tutelage, which encouraged political patronage, corruption, and
centralization of power within the ejido communities (Barry, 1995; Gates, 1993). Similar to ejidos, agrarian communities acted as a second unit of land redistribution, consisting of grants of land to indigenous groups.
²Compared to men, women have been structurally disadvantaged due to legislated, differential access to
what Goldring (1996a) has termed the ejido "package of agrarian rights" in the Mexican countryside.
Ejido membership is not just simply a land title, but a broad 'package' of rights. Ejidos differ in terms of
their access to the package and the elements it includes, as do the individuals within each ejido.
state. As women and children take up work formerly done by their husbands and fathers, the state is not only exempt from exercising social responsibility towards the countryside, but capital is provided with a cheap labour force. On the other hand, in areas where commercial agriculture is being encouraged, unprecedented numbers of women are forming the ranks of the cheap labour force which makes large-scale export-oriented enterprises competitive (Barrón, 1994; Lara, in press). Moreover, the acceptance of structural adjustment packages since 1982 have relied fundamentally on (women’s) unpaid labour within the household to absorb the costs of economic restructuring and prevent generalized social unrest (Benería and Feldman, 1992; Elson, 1990).

Throughout Latin America, research has shown that the economic and ecological hardships of capitalist development has fallen disproportionately on landless and land-poor rural women (Stephen, 1992). The “feminization” of poverty is a term that has been coined to refer to the process by which women are disproportionately affected by growing impoverishment due to the historical cheapening of their labour power, devaluation of their domestic non-waged labour, and the structural disadvantages they face in general terms as related to the subordination of their gender (Arizpe, 1989; Elson, 1990; Robles et. al, 1993). In Mexico, authors have signaled the following phenomenon: women are over-represented among the country’s poor; female-headed households have higher indices of poverty; women’s employment is often unstable and lesser paid; women are almost always assigned the vast majority of domestic responsibilities, no matter how onerous their burden outside that sphere; and women’s health and life expectancy have declined in association with these trends (Benería and Feldman, 1992; Robles et. al., 1993). The ‘feminization of poverty’ has been exacerbated under neoliberal reform, having diverse implications and responses among regions, ethnic groups, and generations. This is a result not only of the neoliberal model of development that has deepened social polarization along various hierarchies, but also a consequence of the macroeconomic state policies concomitant to that model aimed at the agricultural sector. For example, the state has abandoned any
hopes for ameliorating gender inequalities in land tenure by announcing the end of agrarian reform and by opening the *ejido* sector to privatization. These new laws limit women’s access to *ejido* rights and curtail their participation concerning the sale of the parcel since through privatization the *ejido* is transformed from a family patrimony into an individualized property title for the (male) family head.

The research for this thesis endeavored to answer the following questions:

1) What have been the implications for rural women of recent state attempts to restructure the agricultural sector (1988-1994) and how have they adapted and responded to these changes in their lives?

2) On a more general level, to what extent does Mexico’s low wage ‘comparative advantage’ rely on rural women’s subordination?

Specifically, the field work focused on exploring these issues:

1) What policies were directed at the agricultural sector during the Salinas administration (1988-1994) and how have they affected rural women?

2) To what extent have women’s activities in *ejidos* geared towards subsistence production of basic grains been modified and/or intensified in the time period addressed by this study?
   2.1) What are the consequences for these women of such changes, in terms of processes such as the feminization of subsistence farming or the expansion of the domestic work load?

3) To what extent have women’s activities in *ejidos* geared towards commercial production been modified and/or intensified?
   3.1) What are the consequences for these women of such changes, in terms of processes such as women’s proletarianization or the lengthening of their work day?

1.2 ‘Many Mexicos’: Choosing A Research Site

Addressing questions such as ‘who are Mexican rural women?’ and ‘which is the most appropriate research site for this thesis?’ becomes difficult considering the vastly diverse realities in the Mexican countryside. The different regions, geographies, cultures, and ethnicities of the ‘many Mexicos’ (Simpson, 1941) prohibits a unitary view of the Mexican countryside and the people who live there. The progressive erosion of the so-
called traditional peasant economy and the gradual expansion of capitalist agriculture has
deepened regional polarization and expanded the spectrum of roles and relations in which
the peasantry is involved. Rural women’s groups, field workers, and researchers have
made considerable progress in exposing the multiple subjectivities that make up the female
rural population:

The new reality in the countryside is expressed by a heterogeneous group
of rural women who have daily transformed their lifestyles and have
diversified their productive activities in order to achieve their families’ and
communities’ subsistence. Mexico’s rural women of today are agricultural
producers, agribusiness workers, craftswomen involved in export, day
labourers in high technology agriculture, homeworkers, young students,

Refuting a unitary view of rural women allows the recognition of other processes that
interact with gender, and thus the different experiences and conditions of gender
subordination, such as those lived by indigenous women, for example, or landless women.
Such a perspective also permits seeing women not as victims of their diverse situations but
as a multiplicity of actors in their own right—inventive and creative subjects (D’Aubeterre,
1995).

Although the relations of gender subordination are not identical within the peasant
population (due to regional, ethnic, age, and class conditions that provoke different
expressions) there are some general characteristics rural women often share: limited
participation in personal, family, and community decision-making; overwhelming
responsibility for housework; discrimination suffered in waged employment; and the sexual
violence they face daily (Aranda, 1993). The life expectancy of women in the countryside
(69.5 years) is three years less than urban women (72.7) (Aranda, 1993). This gap grows,
however, if differences between social sectors in the countryside are considered. Female
agricultural day labourers have a life expectancy of twelve years less than the average for
rural women (Aranda, 1993).
The State of Puebla, located southeast on Mexico’s Central Plateau, was chosen as the research site because it is an interesting case example of the diversity of agricultural activity in the central and southern regions of Mexico, and thus the diversity of rural women’s realities (Fig.1.1). Each one of Puebla’s 217 municipalities is engaged to varying degrees in agricultural activity (predominantly food production), but they do not produce under similar conditions owing to great difference among the agro-ecological regions (López Pérez, 1995c). Like many states in the region, it is marked by few industrial centers alongside large expanses of rural countryside.

The two communities selected to answer the research question are located slightly more than 30 kilometres outside the metropolis of Puebla (Fig. 1.2). San Miguel Acuexcomac, to south-east, lies on the rain-fed, rocky skirts of the Tentzo Cordillera and engages in subsistence production of basic grains. It is located within the municipality of San Juan Tzicatlacoyan. Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo, south-west of Puebla, lies in the heart of the Atlixco Valley, and engages in irrigated production of vegetables and flowers. Both communities were granted ejido land, San Miguel in 1929 and Nexatengo in 1932, and are home to 1226 and 1086 residents, respectively (INEGI, 1990).

These two communities are indicative of the regional diversity of agriculture in Puebla, and the diverse realities of rural women. This contrast was designed principally to provide sketches of 1) the peasant production currently discouraged by the government of Mexico as not “competitive” (basic grains); and 2) the “comparative advantage” alternative posed by higher value crops. State policies under economic restructuring, such as those carried out under the Programa Nacional de la Modernización del Campo 1990-1994 (National Program of the Modernization of the Countryside), have been proposed with the intention to encourage so-called “inefficient” grain producers to shift production to higher value crops, such as fruits and vegetables (Marsh and Runsten, 1995).
Fig 1.1: The State of Puebla

Source: Van Young (1992)
Fig 1.2: Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo and San Miguel Acuxcomac

Source: Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes (1994)
1.2.1 Physical Geography

South-east on Mexico's Central Plateau, the state of Puebla lies between the Sierra Nevada and the western portion of the Sierra Madre Oriental. Puebla has a total area of 33,919 square kilometres, representing 1.7% of the nation's surface area. It is bordered by seven Mexican states: to the north and east by the state of Veracruz, to the south by the state of Oaxaca, to the south east by Guerrero and to the west by the states of Hidalgo, Tlaxcala, Morelos, and México.

Puebla’s physical geography is principally defined by the Sierra Madre Oriental and the Neovolcanic Cordillera mountain ranges (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1987). In the former, altitudes reach as high as 4,282 metres above sea level, while in the latter, altitudes are more extreme, the highest reaching 5,747 metres above sea level. In the south, the Sierra Madre de Oaxaca creates the Balsas depression and the Tehuacán and Tomellín valleys. The Sierra Madre del Golfo range runs north to south, parallel to the coast. Puebla is also home to numerous valleys and wide plains, where some of the most important regional centres are located: Puebla City, Tehuacán, San Martín Texmelucan, and Atlixco.

The state of Puebla, owing to its physical geography and its diversity of altitudes and natural regions, has one of the most varied climates in the country. To speak of an average would be highly misleading, although the median temperature for the state is 16°C. The rainy season begins in May and ends in October. Approximately eleven types of climate have been registered; however, the state is distinguished by five principal climatic regions: 1) the central and southern part of the state is temperate subhumid with over 850 cubic millimetres of precipitation and an average temperature of 15°C; 2) the south-east is marked by a warm and semi-warm climate, both subhumid, with 830 mm³ of precipitation and an average temperature of 22°C; 3) the north has a similar climate but it is humid, with average precipitation of 2,250 mm³ and an average temperature of 22°C; 4) in the south-east there are areas in which the climate is semi-arid, and the temperature varies from
temperate to warm, with average precipitation of 550 mm\(^3\); and 5) the volcanic zones, with the climate varying from semi-cold to very cold (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1987).

1.2.2 Important Historical Notes

To date, Puebla ranks fifth in terms of percentage of indigenous language speaking residents, next to Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz, and Yucatán (INEGI, 1990). The various indigenous groups that today constitute part of Puebla’s population are testimony of the diversity of inhabitants that have lived in the area since the arrival of nomadic peoples in approximately 10,000 B.C. (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1987). The southern portion of the state, including Tepexi, Acatlán, and Chiautla, was settled by Mixtecs, whose territory extends into Oaxaca and Guerrero. The Olmec, Nahau, and Popoloca settled in the central part of the current state, assimilating the Toltec culture that flourished in Cholula. The northern portion of the state was inhabited by Mazatecs, Otomies, and Totonacs. By 1450, all of these indigenous populations were subordinated to the Mexica, who had arrived in central Mexico around 1325 and rapidly emerged as the leading military and political power in the region (Berdan, 1982). By the time of the Spanish arrival in 1519, the Mexica had formed the vast Triple Alliance (or Aztec) empire in Mesoamerica with their neighbors to the east (Acolhuacans of Texcoco) and the west (Tepehuanos of Tlacopan) (Berdan, 1982). Several important economic, political, and religious centers of this period were located within Puebla’s current borders, such as the city of Cholula and the Atlixco Valley.

The Spanish, led by Hernán Cortés, had successfully conquered Mexica rule by 1521. Catholic religious orders were central to the Spanish colonization process, facilitating the imposition of the Spanish language and the Catholic religion. Most notable in the Puebla area were the Franciscans, who had great influence in founding the city on a settlement previously known as Cuetlaxcoapan (1531). The region Puebla-Tlaxcala was

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3 Mesoamerica refers to a large cultural region designated by anthropologists that extends from central Mexico into Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras.
one of the first bishoprics of New Spain established at the beginning of the 16th century and several important political administrative centers were located within its jurisdiction (Cuena, 1987). The region’s wheat-producing valleys--divided into extensive haciendas--constituted the Puebla area as the principal “bread basket” of the new colony. Puebla was not only the most important cereal-producing region; it also had the greatest concentration of mills in New Spain in the 17th century (Garavaglia and Grosso, 1987). Next only to Mexico City, Puebla was considered the most important city in New Spain, both as an industrial center that highlighted textile production and as a key intermediate stop between Mexico City and the port of Veracruz. In the 19th century, however, Puebla began to lose its position of importance when other provincial cities (Guadalajara, Xalapa) began to compete in those areas key to the state’s economy (e.g. textiles, trade) (Garavaglia and Grosso, 1987). In terms of population, however, Puebla held a slight lead over Guadalajara by mid century, with 71,000 residents in 1852 (Meyer and Sherman, 1991).

During the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911), the state of Puebla experienced relative political stability and economic growth, ranking as Mexico’s fifth most important state, with leading industries such as textiles, tobacco, sugar cane, and electrical energy (La France, 1987). Most of the benefits of this period, however, were concentrated among a small elite, while the numbers of the impoverished grew (LaFrance, 1987). When in 1907 the international economic crisis began to take effect in Mexico, many ranchers, small businessmen, and industrialists began plotting to replace Díaz. The crisis had also begun to generate a great deal of labour unrest, especially among Puebla’s textile workers who unleashed a wave of strikes (LaFrance, 1987; Meyer and Sherman, 1991). Due to the process of land concentration that occurred under Díaz, Puebla’s rural residents--85% of the population--were often landless or land-poor peasants on the state’s 400 haciendas (La France, 1987).

Puebla was a key site for events of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), but the initial call to arms did not come from the most oppressed social strata. Members of the
 aristocratic Serdán family of Puebla were important collaborators of Francisco Madero, a young outspoken opponent of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz who made the first call to arms. Madero, a statesman and landowner, was more interested in reforming the Mexican constitution to prevent Díaz’s re-election than making serious changes in the country’s socio-economic fabric. When the Serdáns resisted their house arrest in Puebla City in 1910, the armed stage of the Mexican Revolution was initiated.

Madero’s original revolutionary call had mentioned agrarian reform, but peasants had their own leaders. Beginning in 1912, Puebla became important territory for the activities of Emiliano Zapata and his revolutionary peasant army. Puebla not only borders Zapata’s home state of Morelos, but the social injustice in the countryside made it ripe for a peasant revolt. When Madero showed no intention of meeting peasant demands once in power, the Zapatistas refused to recognize his governments in Morelos, Puebla, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. Due to heavy repression in Morelos, the Zapatistas reorganized their army in south-eastern Puebla. It was in the Puebla Sierra where Zapata’s famous Plan de Ayala was signed, a document that did not recognize the presidency of Francisco Madero and more importantly, reiterated the Zapatistas’ armed commitment to resolving the agrarian question. In 1912, the first land was redistributed to peasants under the Plan in Puebla by Zapatistas.

Madero was forcefully removed from the presidency in 1912 by General Huerta, a high-ranking general of Díaz. His reign was quickly overshadowed by Venustiano Carranza, an ultra-respectable, elite politician, who managed to unite the rebel forces of Zapata in the south of Mexico and Pancho Villa in the north (Meyer and Sherman, 1991). Once in government, Carranza failed to accept the Plan de Ayala. Zapatista forces took Puebla City in December 1914, but shortly thereafter lost it to Carrancista troops. Constitutionalist forces united to defeat the Zapatistas, but even after Zapata’s assassination in 1919 the movement continued. Nonetheless, they were soon forced to enter into negotiations and agreed to suspend activities in the Puebla area, and by 1920 they had laid
down their arms on a national level. That year, Carranza was assassinated and the state entered into a post-war period of instability and violence that lasted until 1929. In this year the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), an ancestor of the ruling PRI, was formed.

In the 1930s, the political situation in Mexico began to stabilize under Plutarco Calles, a general who held power both directly and behind the scenes for a decade (1924-1934). Puebla began to develop once again its industrial base, communications, and services in urban areas, as well as experiencing land redistribution in the countryside. Mexico’s agrarian reform did not radically change land tenancy until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) who redistributed twice as much land as his predecessors combined (Meyer and Sherman, 1991).

1.1.3 Current Social Issues in Puebla

In the last five decades the State of Puebla has experienced accelerated demographic growth, reflecting increases in life expectancy and reductions in infant mortality (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1987). The 1995 national census estimated that state of Puebla is home to a population of 4,624,239 (INEGI, 1995). Like other central states, Puebla is marked by few industrial centers alongside large expanses of rural countryside. Out of Puebla’s 217 municipalities, only five are industrialized, and over 35% of the population is concentrated within them (Gámez, 1996). Three of these—Puebla City, Cholula, and Huejotzingo—practically belong to the metropolitan zone and San Martín Texmelucan is a satellite, leaving Tehuacán as the only ‘isolated’ industrialized municipality in terms of production and services (Gámez, 1996). Approximately 41% of the state’s population inhabited rural areas in 1990, which is higher than the national average of 26% (Bancomext, 1993; INEGI, 1990).

Poverty is largely concentrated in the countryside, most notably in areas of high indigenous populations such as the Sierra Norte in the north or the Mixteca in the south (López Pérez, 1995b). Today, the state of Puebla is considered to be the sixth most marginalized state in the Mexican Republic, after Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Hidalgo, and
Veracruz, when factors such as per capita income, housing, and access to basic services are considered (Vargas, 1995). Liverman and Cravey (1992) have developed a physical quality of life index (PQLI) in order to map Mexico regionally; Puebla is considered one of the few central states with a very poor PQLI. A poor PQLI reflects lowers levels of life expectancy and literacy, and higher infant mortality (Liverman and Cravey, 1992).

High rates of poverty in the countryside contrast markedly with Puebla City, where the State government is currently putting the final touches on plans for a downtown mega-project, including a ‘modern’ boardwalk to attract foreign visitors and investors. Including the metropolitan area, Puebla is the fourth largest city on a national level and thus a key target in efforts to decentralize Mexico City (González and Pang, 1993). The city has expanded at phenomenal rates, often at the expense of agricultural communities in the periphery (Gámez, 1996). From 1960 to 1980, the number of the state’s inhabitants concentrated in Puebla City jumped from 15 to 24.9% (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1987). This growth is attributable not only to a high birth rate and decentralization attempts but internal rural-urban migration due to processes of skewed regional development (D’Aubeterre, 1995; Smith, 1993).

Some regional geographers stress the importance of urbanization in Mexican regional developments (Bataillon, 1971; Scott, 1982, cited in Liverman and Cravey, 1992). In the Central Plateau, both Puebla City and Mexico City are important industrial centres, where considerable wealth is concentrated. Industry in Puebla--particularly textiles--has grown during the past four decades, especially in the fields of high technology, sophisticated equipment and machinery, sugar, paper, and petrochemicals (Bancomext, 1993). Automobile manufacturing is a key industry, with the large Volkswagen plant just outside of the capital city, built in the 1950s. In 1987, the industrial manufacturing sub-

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4The population of Mexico’s Federal District in 1990 was estimated at 15 million, 5.3 times larger than the second largest city and comprising 15 % of the country’s total population (Gonzalez and Pang, 1993). Efforts to control or plan the city’s growth came too little too late. The massive earthquake that devastated large portions of the city in September of 1985 clearly demonstrated the extent of the problem. As well, growing atmospheric pollution is another indication of the need to decentralize.
sector contributed 27% of the state’s gross national product, higher than the national average of 23%. The entire industrial sector’s contribution to the GDP has risen considerably since 1960, when it was 20.4%. By 1970, this percentage grew to 30.5%, and to 34.8% by 1980. The secondary sector, however, only absorbed one-quarter of the economically active population in 1990, owing to labour-displacing technological advances (INEGI, 1990). Several small and medium industries, lacking government initiatives and supports, found themselves unable to compete with the rapid commercial opening (Olivares Zamora, 1994). After the currency devaluation in December 1994, many industrialists with credit burdens went bankrupt. Industrial development in Puebla, therefore, is currently incapable of offering substantial employment opportunities in the city. This is particularly grave considering the degree of economic depression in the Puebla countryside.

Puebla’s agricultural sector has lost dynamism since the 1960s, only contributing 12% of the gross national product in 1990, yet absorbing 36% of the economically active population for that year (INEGI, 1990). The low levels of productivity are reflected in producer incomes—Puebla has the second lowest per capita income in agriculture on a national level (López Pérez, 1995c). The majority of Puebla’s agricultural land is held in ejidos or agrarian communities, largely a peasant sector. According to data from the VII Censo Agropecuario (Farm Census VII) carried out in 1994, three out of every four agricultural producers are ejidatarios (López Pérez, 1995b).

Agricultural activity predominates throughout the state of Puebla. The most important crops include corn, sorghum, beans, alfalfa and sugarcane (Bancomext, 1993). Corn is mostly grown in the ejido sector. It represents one of Puebla’s most important crops, and is grown in all zones under a great diversity of climates. In 1984, corn comprised 70% of agricultural land under cultivation (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1987).

\footnote{On a national level, agriculture absorbs 26% of the economically active population and contributes 7.4% to the gross national product (INEGI, 1994)}
While corn producers in the Puebla valley were earning the majority of household income from corn production in the 1970s, a series of factors related to the economic crisis and the reorientation of national policy in the 1980s reversed this trend (Díaz, 1994).

Pockets of capitalist agribusiness involved in export coexist in regions with low-income peasant communities. In the state of Puebla, only 130,000 hectares of the 893,910 hectares suitable for agriculture are irrigated and 75% of this portion is fed by small, pre-Conquest irrigation systems rather than modern infrastructure (Ocampo, 1994). Irrigated land is overwhelmingly concentrated in three regions--Tehuacán, Izúcar de Matamoros, and Puebla. More than half of the irrigated land in 1991 was dedicated to the production of fruits and vegetables, constituting this state as the principal producer on a national level in terms of surface area planted. Puebla ranks fifth in number of *ejidatario* fruit and vegetable producers (Marsh and Runsten, 1995; Ocampo, 1994). Fruit and vegetable production is labour intensive; approximately 40% of those employed in the primary sector in the state of Puebla are day labourers (INEGI, 1990). Commercial agriculture increased its economic importance in this state in the early 1970s with the opening of the Mexico-Puebla highway (Ocampo, 1994). Although some authors have claimed commercial agriculture in Puebla suffers from a labour shortage (Díaz, 1994; Marroni, 1994), and agricultural wages are higher than the minimum wage (Barrón, 1994), the wages are still too low to keep employee turnover down, as agricultural labourers prefer to migrate to national and international urban labour markets.

State-level agricultural policies have fallen closely in line with current national level policies to 'modernize' the countryside. Part of this plan is a decentralization process, so that the state government takes on more responsibilities of the federal government in the countryside. The viability of this scenario is questionable. During the 1980-1991 period, federal investment in rural development in the state of Puebla suffered an almost 90% real decrease, representing in 1991 one percent of all federal funds destined for this state (Ramírez, 1994).
1.3 ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING IN EVERYDAY LIFE: GROUNDING POLITICAL ECONOMY IN ETHNOGRAPHY

This thesis attempts to examine a specific macro-economic development model (neoliberalism in the Mexican countryside) by exploring its micro dimensions. As such, it is crucial to explore theories of development from a critical historical materialist perspective. This perspective, furthermore, must focus inclusively on all spheres of production, from the global economy to the internal dynamics of the peasant household. The research methods employed reflect these objectives, ranging from reviewing economic theories, exploring recent and past government policies towards the Mexican countryside, and conversations with the individuals whose lives are intimately involved in these processes. This section outlines the theoretical orientations on which the research project was based and the corresponding methodology.

1.3.1 Theoretical Orientations

Throughout this thesis, critical political economy is the theoretical perspective framing discussions on economic restructuring, agricultural crises, and gender. (Neo)Marxist theories of political economy offer a critique of orthodox discourse by highlighting class antagonisms and structural arrangements in production. Neo-Marxist theories have been characterized as looking at imperialism from the perspective of the peripheral countries and examining the consequences of imperialist penetration; as refuting the historically progressive role of imperialism and capitalism, which have often led to the ‘underdevelopment' of the South; as integrating ecological consciousness into their vision of a post-capitalist society; and as looking at class relations in a spatial sense, where the appropriation of surplus plays a role both within and between countries (Brohman, 1996; Schuurman, 1993). Clearly, the way in which Mexico's economy has developed is not owing to some form of psychological or cultural ‘backwardness' inherent to the nation but rather its historical position in the capitalist world system and its internal class structure and struggles. In terms of the agricultural sector, critical political economy focuses on
how the capitalist mode of production has shaped Mexico’s countryside, articulating at
times non-capitalist forms of production in order to facilitate a process of accumulation on
national and global scales. Such a perspective can help explain how current processes
such as the growing internationalization of this sector and recent macro-economic policies
fit into this picture. Furthermore, feminist social scientists have shown that this framework
can prove effective in exploring how gender interacts with class and ethnicity—three
“irreducible categories that designate specific relations of economic, political, and
ideological domination” (Fernández Kelly, 1989).

Certain aspects of world-systems theories (Wallerstein, 1974) and new
international division of labour theories (Fröbel et al., 1981) are useful to this debate.
World-systems theory has been critiqued since its emergence in 1970s for its taxonomic
divisions of “core,” “periphery,” “semi-periphery,” and for failing to move away from
analysis that is purely historical description (Fernández Kelly, 1989). World-systems
theory, however, contributes the notion of ‘articulation’ to explain how world capitalism
has extended wage labour and commodity exchange as predominant features of the
economy while preserving pre-existing productive arrangements (subsistence, domestic
production) to facilitate accumulation. Furthermore, it insists on the global economy as
the unit of analysis, and looks at historical processes such as how the development of
advanced capitalist countries has been achieved through the incorporation of ‘peripheral’
countries in relations of unequal exchange. New international division of labour theories
demonstrate how investments have expanded in low-wage areas throughout the world in
an effort to overcome declining profitability in the latest phase of capitalism, which
simultaneously disciplines the work force in high-wage areas (see Fröbel et al., 1981; Nash
and Fernández Kelly, 1983). Economists of the French Regulation School (e.g. Lipietz,
1992) have made significant contributions to understanding the global reorganization of
production, arguing that recent economic restructuring and the further globalization of
world capitalism result from the crisis of ‘Fordism’ in the United States and can be seen as attempts to establish the basis for a new regime of capital accumulation (Harvey, 1989).\(^6\)

These theories further an understanding of current macro-economic changes in the global economy. However, they have come under extensive critique—especially within anthropology—for their failure to explore local models in their analysis. Escobar (1995) claims that inquiries within political economy fall short of their task by overlooking the cultural dynamics inherent in the incorporation of local forms by a global system of economic and cultural production (1995). Forms of production, he writes, cannot be seen as independent from the multiplicity of representations—or ‘models’—of social life in which they exist. Escobar claims “a political economy of global economic and cultural production must then explain both the new forms of capital accumulation and the local discourses through which the global forms are necessarily deployed” (1995: 98).

Such an approach endeavors to rethink the economics of ‘development’ from two points of departure. On one hand, this entails placing oneself in the space of local constructions, in order to recognize the plurality of models of the economy which exist. At the same time:

what needs to be studied at these levels is the mechanisms by which local cultural knowledge and economic resources are appropriated by larger forces (mechanisms such as unequal exchange and surplus extraction between center and periphery, country and city, classes, genders, and ethnic groups) and, conversely, the ways in which local innovation and gains can be preserved as part of local economic and cultural power (Escobar, 1995: 98).

Appendini, a researcher who deals mostly with aggregate data of Mexico’s agricultural sector and the global food system, concurs with Escobar’s approach:

\(^6\)The Fordist regime of capital accumulation, which was strengthened following World War II, was predicated on a match between greater mass consumption and higher mass production (Lipietz, 1989). This arrangement, which depended on a productivity pact between the welfare state, labour unions, and the private sector, resulted in stable economic growth and capital accumulation in the U.S. until the late 1960s (Otero, 1996).
Seen in retrospect, it is very understandable that with the crisis installed and the “campesinista” project canceled, not only in academic discourse but in the sphere of farm policy, the task of research in terms of the agrarian question is to abandon the theoretical debate about the peasantry in order to break down an empirical study of that complex, changing, adaptable mosaic that is the Mexican agrarian reality and whose dynamism goes beyond academic reflection [...] The countryside’s response to the crisis and transformations in farming policy has had profound effects in the economic activity of the countryside, in labour markets, in the organization of producers and the civil population and have altered the daily life of the population (1992, my translation).

In the current epoch of economic restructuring, there is indeed a growing need to complement data bases with local and region-specific research that explores the differences within and among ejidos, as well as the gendered aspects of ejido formation and development (Pérez, 1995).

The gathering of ethnographic research on the lived realities of rural women in this thesis attempts to illuminate, then, both how macro-economic policy is manifested on the local level. A macro-economic fixation on relations of production and the state ignores the micro-realities. As Marroni (1994) argues, the philosophy underlying the construction of knowledge that privileges the macro, the structural, the economic and the political simultaneously demotes the micro, the social, the oral tradition, the subjective, and the spaces of everyday life. Such a methodology:

... fosters the historical absence of women [...] If we search for women in the spaces where they can be visualized—the private sphere—we seem to be accepting the discourse dividing reality into two artificial, oppositional and mutually exclusive spheres: the public and the private. Through examining the spaces to which women have been relegated, however—the private world—we may discover their presence in the public world, demonstrate their integrated roles in both spheres, and describe a dialectical social division of labor in which both sexes participate (Marroni, 1994:194).

Goldring’s (1996b) research with men and women migrants clearly demonstrates that “rural landscapes are not genderless spaces” (317). She argues for increased attention to rural inhabitants’ voices of both sexes, since women’s voices have often received less
attention. Through such an actor-centered analysis, social actors are conceptualized as gendered subjects.

1.3.2 Methodology

The field work centered on exploring women’s everyday realities and lived experiences in the context of a transforming countryside. The research concentrated on qualitative methods of analysis, designed to focus on rural women’s voices. In order to select the communities and the participants, background research was required. This involved exploring community documents, census information, data from the Agrarian Attorney General’s office in Puebla (Procuraduría Agraria, PA), and existing research. It also involved a guided tour of the region by rural promoters working in the zone.

The communities to be selected had to provide contrasting realities under the reorientation of national agricultural policy. Owing to limitations of time and scope, only two different research sites could be incorporated into the project. As a result, the communities were to reflect on one hand, the small producer agriculture discouraged by government rhetoric as 'not competitive' (basic grains) and on the other, the more ‘competitive’ alternatives posed (higher value commercial crops). Both of the communities had to be ejidos to remain consistent, since the ejido has been the institutional framework for government policy towards peasants since the Revolution.

The community of San Miguel Acuexcomac, where basic grains are produced on a subsistence level, was chosen because it met all the criteria and because two theses on the area had been just published on themes similar to my research project. One was by D’Aubeterre and Fagetti (1992), from the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (the state university), and the other by B. Salcido (1991), from the Colegio de Postgraduados (an agricultural science institute). In both cases, questionnaires were applied to a random sample of over 50 households, recording information on land tenancy and labour market activity. This information was important in understanding the processes
at work in San Miguel. My thesis went beyond these studies by exploring the new policy framework, such as ejido reform, from a comparative analysis.

Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo was chosen to as the community involved in commercial agriculture after an extensive tour of the Atlixco Valley that involved interviews with producers in several communities. Nexatengo produces a variety of market-oriented crops (alfalfa, milk, flowers, vegetables) under much different conditions than those facing San Migueneños (irrigation, highway access, etc.). Production in Nexatengo is also entirely geared to commercial production since all producers have access to irrigated land, whereas in some communities only a portion of the ejido is irrigated.

Both communities were selected from regions where the people consider themselves to be ‘mestizo’ rather than indigenous. While they and other rural inhabitants simply consider themselves campesinos, or people of the country, to people of the city, to employers in regions of commercial agriculture, to government bureaucrats, they are often also considered indios, Indians. Behar, writing about a market woman from San Luis Potosí, explains:

[Esperanza’s] Indianness is not based in an ethnic identity, but in race/class distinctions that have developed since the European conquest of Mexico and that continue to assert the power of white-skin privilege ... It is more accurate to say that she has been ‘de-Indianized’, her Indian identity (once Tlaxcalan) having been displaced [...] [She] is part of the vast marginal Mexican population that has been internally colonized to think of itself as descended from Indians and yet can claim no pride or virtue in that heritage (1993: 8).

7 Mestizo is a term used here to refer to non-indigenous groups. Mestizo most commonly refers to Mexicans of mixed descent.
The fact that the two communities have Nahua origins also removed any confusion from the research in regards to ethnic differences in the gendering of behaviour and space among indigenous groups.8

Based on the data from the theses on San Miguel that outlined agricultural production, labour market activity and land holding size, 15 participants were selected from three different age groups (Appendix 1). In the community of Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo no recent research had been carried out. As a result, I constructed a brief questionnaire that was applied to over 30 households (Appendix 2). The questionnaire focused on relation to land (as ejidatario, landless, share-cropper), household income sources (agricultural production, day labour, migrant remittances); household division of labour, among other variables. From the results of the questionnaire, a group of 15 women were selected (Appendix 3). Throughout the thesis, informants’ names appear as pseudonyms, in order to protect their anonymity. Each name is followed by a letter-number combination (e.g. María, A-5). ‘A’ refers to informants from San Miguel Acuexcomac, ‘Z’ from Nexatengo’s residents. Numbers 20-29 refer to the 18-34 age group; 10-19 refer to the 35-44 age group, and 1-9 refer to the 44 and over age group. All men are numbered from 30-39. Thus, María, A-5, is from Acuexcomac, and is 44 or older. This gives quick reference, but her exact age is also listed in the general list of informants (Appendix 4). All persons involved in the research gave their informed consent before questionnaires or interviews took place. This involved identifying myself as a researcher, providing an oral outline of the motivations, intentions and objectives of my research, and answering any questions.

For a nine month period from September 1994 to May 1995 I stayed in the communities for extended lengths of time. I also made sporadic visits between January and April 1996. In each community, permission to conduct research was sought from the

8To provide an example, Mixtec peasant women are often found drinking and laughing in bars on market day, whereas peasant women (often Nahau or mestizo) would rarely be found in public drinking establishments and may even refuse a drink at a family wedding (Culturas Populares, October 1994).
Food and lodging was also requested, and in each community I stayed with a family. I did not pay for my accommodation but periodically purchased groceries for my hosts. After getting to know my family hosts, informants for the research project were approached. Various short interviews based on general data, number of children, age at marriage, crop yields, etc. soon gave way to longer, open-ended interviews, where the informant spoke at length on a variety of issues, or about their personal history. Some informants were involved in numerous subsequent interviews and oral history gathering sessions. An interview guide was prepared, but the bulk of research rested on free range conversations. Such digressions in the interview process opened the conversation to a variety of issues, which often led back to the thesis's central themes. The interviews were all transcribed into Spanish, and then sections were translated for use in the thesis.

Interviews took place in a variety of circumstances--while tending sheep, while tortillas were prepared, or as a mat was woven; and at a variety of times--late at night, Sunday afternoons, early mornings. In both communities, I was invited to various celebrations (weddings, coming-of-age birthdays, Holy Week, religious processions) and meetings (ejido assemblies, the women's group). Apart from the immediate informant groups, I spoke with community leaders, migrants, and priests. In both communities I was warmly accepted, and treated by some informants as a friend. It was not rare to be invited in for a meal, or for the women of a family to invite me to bathe with them in the temascal (steam bath). Other interviews were conducted with rural field workers from the Colegio de Postgraduados who work in both the Tzicatlacoyan and Atlixco Valley region; field workers from the Procuraduría Agraria, independent agricultural engineers, and capitalists investing in agriculture. Throughout the research period, I consistently attempted to keep myself aware any aspect of my research that could negatively influence

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9The leadership of most ejidos consists of an Ejido Commissariat, a treasurer, a secretary, and a three member 'vigilance' committee to oversee the three principal positions. They are appointed to a two-year term.
the members of the community, and retained a critical distance between myself and the participants. All information gathered from interviews, personal testimonies, and interviews in this thesis will be kept confidential.

1.3.3 IMPLICATIONS

The thesis shows that recent economic restructuring has implied serious, often negative impacts, on agricultural production in both San Miguel and Nexatengo. This held consequences for the reproductive strategies exercised in each household and thus in women’s lives. In the chapter on San Miguel Acuexcomac, it is shown that since the 1940s, this community has relied on non-agricultural wages derived from male emigration to the United States and Mexico City. As these trends have increased, household survival strategies have been revised, with adult women continuing to ensure subsistence production with or without the help of migrant remittances. Under recent economic restructuring, (male) migration has become more attractive, especially to the U.S. Furthermore, with rising prices for basic goods, families are experiencing a more precarious existence. In the chapter on Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo, it is shown that this community is confronting rapid and important changes. For producers, commercial production of flowers and vegetables in the current context has become a money-losing venture. *Ejidalarios* are opting to rent their lands or plant alfalfa—a less expensive, labour-intensive crop. Alfalfa is becoming a preferred crop since small-scale dairy production has become one of the few sources of income. For day labourers employed by *ejidalarios* and investors on *ejido* land, changing crop patterns have contracted the local labour market. A new, feminized, labour market is opening up, however, with the large, floriculture ranches. The conditions of work—long, erratic hours—and the low pay are being exploited to maintain the profitability of these enterprises. Furthermore, (male) emigration has emerged since the 1980s in this community an alternative to scarce, poorly paid field work.
This thesis is particularly relevant to studies on the Mexican countryside that focus on international and local labour markets, migration, agricultural production, and land tenancy issues. Comparative analysis of rural inhabitants' responses to recent economic restructuring and the specific reorientation of national agricultural policy must be executed due to the important differences between ejidos and regions (size, resource endowment, location, history, cropping patterns, profitability, market integration, off-farm employment opportunities, etc.) (Goldring, 1996a). This thesis provides an in-depth examination of two local models in the State of Puebla.

Most importantly, this thesis brings gender into perspective, an essential exercise to understand the processes occurring in the countryside. The field research was designed to give historical presence and authority to rural peoples' voices—in this case women's—on processes that have global proportions. Brodie (1994) claims the first step in a feminist analysis of restructuring is to explore how the dominant discourse of globalization hides or ignores gender-specific consequences. Women's voices must be taken into account if rural social scientists, planners, and others are to truly understand rural realities. Illuminating the implications of global economic restructuring in these two communities may serve to increase awareness on the outcomes of neoliberalism in specific contexts, while also drawing the linkages of our global interconnectedness. Resistance to neoliberal economics is occurring on an international scale; the largest planned to date is the Forum for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism taking place July 27-August 3, 1996 that has been organized by the Zapatista revolutionary army and civil organizations in Chiapas.

This thesis consists of six chapters. This chapter has outlined the research problem, the research site, the theoretical framework, and methodology employed. In Chapter 2, the transformation of the Mexican economy under neoliberal restructuring is discussed, with specific focus on the agricultural sector. A brief background to the agricultural crisis is provided in order to explore current reforms under the Salinas administration. The third chapter is a literature review of rural women, work, and state policies in Mexico. The first
section outlines how gender subordination has been manifested in the Mexican countryside, while the second section focuses on current agricultural policies. Chapter 4 presents San Miguel Acuexcomac, the community engaging in subsistence corn production with heavy male emigration. Chapter 5 presents Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo, the community engaging in market-oriented production and in supplying labour to large, capitalist producers. In Chapter 6, I discuss the conclusions from the field data through comparison and contrast of the two sites, and provide closing reflections on the thesis.
NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND THE MEXICAN COUNTRYSIDE

The neoliberal policy framework adopted by the Mexican government since 1982 has had an enormous impact on national agricultural policy, and in general, has transformed the country's rural landscape. The agricultural sector had become increasingly internationalized since the 1960s; however, the most rapid and far-reaching efforts to liberalize this sector occurred during the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). Salinas' most radical moves include the economic opening of the agricultural sector under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the creation of a new land market by allowing formerly inalienable, government-protected ejido land to be privatized. Such changes are rewriting rural realities: support prices for basic grains have dropped to world market prices; families have lost their land to their wealthier neighbours; imported agricultural inputs have doubled in price. Furthermore, Mexico's rural population is not immune to the effects of neoliberalism in other sectors of the economy, such as rising inflation or the disappearance of urban employment opportunities. In order to establish the context for a discussion on gendered processes occurring in the countryside, this chapter provides both a detailed analysis of Mexico's neoliberal economic reform and the changes to national agricultural policy.

2.1 "TO MARKET, TO MARKET": THE RE-ROUTING OF THE MEXICAN ECONOMY

Since Mexico declared a moratorium on its foreign debt payments in the summer of 1982, its model for economic development has undergone major revisions. The economic crisis that emerged in the early 1980s signaled the exhaustion of the post-1940s import substitution industrialization strategy (ISI) on which national development had been predicated.¹ Since the 1960s, economic growth in Mexico had increasingly relied on

¹The central elements of the ISI strategy in Mexico include "protectionist measures against foreign trade, state subsidies of local production and consumption based on increasing government deficits, the
foreign indebtedness to stimulate industrialization (de Janvry, 1987). Agriculture had initially fueled the industrialization process; however, failure to reinvest some of these profits back into the sector led to an acknowledged agrarian crisis in the late 1960s and increased reliance on foreign debt. Oil wealth was able to stall the crisis throughout the 1970s, as demonstrated in the “petrolization” of the economy in 1977 that encouraged a new wave of foreign loans (Gates, 1993). With the plunge of world oil prices in 1981, however, foreign reserves bottomed out. In June of 1982, Mexico declared itself unable to service its US$ 85 billion foreign debt and appealed for assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Under the conditions of debt restructuring, a neoliberal policy framework was imposed on the country by the international lending institutions, a powerful private sector, and transnational capital.² The far-reaching adjustments this policy framework entails have been executed rapidly throughout the last three presidential administrations (1982-present).

Neoliberalism is based fundamentally on the modernization paradigm.³ Key features of the neoliberal development model include: export-oriented industrialization (economic liberalization, open markets, free trade); massive cutbacks in public spending in most sectors of the economy; the privatization of State-owned enterprises; and a policy of controlling wages downward to attract foreign investment (Hettne, 1990). Neoliberal policies, now installed throughout most Latin American countries, have been vigorously promoted by international financial institutions as the solution to the economic crisis gripping the region. Many critics argue that neoliberalism must be analyzed in terms of the historical progression of capitalist accumulation (Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1992). They note

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²By the 1980s, the private sector in Mexico had become increasingly militant and discontent with state populism and corruption and thus supported neoliberalism (Valdes Ugalde, 1996). In the past, the private sector had been effectively coopted by the PRI under a tightly managed corporatist structure.

³The modernization paradigm underpins most mainstream development efforts. Modernization theory is largely rooted in the experiences of a few Western industrialized countries and emphasizes evolutionary development from traditional to modern society (Brohman, 1996).
that neoliberalism emerged at the same time the power of transnational capital--based largely in the imperialist countries of the North--has increased (Brohman, 1996). In this respect, neoliberal theories provide intellectual support for the global reorganization of production to the benefit of these transnational corporations (TNCs), largely facilitated by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF (Brohman 1996; Escobar, 1995).  

Crises of accumulation following the collapse of the post-war Fordist model of development in the United States (Lipietz, 1992) have been accompanied by neoliberal or ‘corporate agenda’ frameworks across the globe in order to facilitate old and new forms of labour exploitation to the benefit of capital. The role of the nation-state in this context is to maintain a favourable climate for investment; that is, ensure a cheap, disciplined work force (Kolko, 1988).

Since 1982, Mexico has earned the reputation of model debtor for its swift execution of virtually all of the adjustment policies promoted by the World Bank and the IMF.  

These have included a reduction in public expenditures; elimination and/or targeting of subsidies; tax reform; restriction of credit; privatization of most state enterprises; trade liberalization; devaluation; removal of barriers to foreign investment; and “competitive” wages (Heredia and Purcell, 1994). From being one of the most protected economies in Latin America, the Mexican economy has become one of the most open. The Mexican government implemented liberalization measures so quickly following the 1982 crisis that they lost bargaining power during the NAFTA negotiations, since the economy had already been opened considerably (Gerardo Otero, personal communication, July 1995).

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4Payer's (1982) critique of international financial institutions, as explored in Escobar (1995), argues that the IMF and the World Bank are among the major perpetrators of the debt crisis in Latin America, and responsible for the subsequent imposition of neoliberal policy frameworks. These institutions maintain intellectual and financial hegemony in guiding 'development' throughout the Third World (Escobar, 1995).

5Barry (1995) cites the comments of a GATT director: “Mexico has helped maintain the pace for bringing about an ambitious reform of the world trading system” (1995: 43).

6In 1982, all imports required government permits, with the highest tariff 100% and an average tariff of 27%. By 1990 permits has been completely removed for most imports, and the highest tariff stands at 16%, with an average tariff of 16% (Otero, 1996).
The NAFTA, then, has less to do with tariffs and trade and more to do with attracting foreign investment (Gates, 1993). International financial institutions were instrumental in installing the neoliberal project in all sectors of the Mexican economy as a shining example for the rest of Latin America. In the period 1980-1991, Mexico received 13 conditional loans with the World Bank, more than any country, and signed six agreements with the IMF (Barry, 1995: 43).

Post-1982 economic restructuring has been implemented in stages. The first stage (1982-1987) attempted to achieve stabilization through drastic austerity measures and the generation of foreign reserves to meet external debt payments. The economy, however, experienced a severe recession, high inflation rates, and a growing financial deficit (Heredia and Purcell, 1994). During the de la Madrid administration (1982-88) inflation was almost as high as 90% and the real GDP growth rate was negative (Stephen, 1992).

The extent of political damage caused by the economic austerity model was revealed in the 1988 presidential elections, where many academic, professional, and civil observers claim the ruling party’s candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, actually lost by a small margin and had to be imposed using more electoral fraud than usual. The second phase of economic restructuring (1987-present) implemented a “heterodox” stabilization program that included further privatization and financial and trade reforms. This program has been highlighted by a series of government initiated “Pacts” to control prices and wages, that have been forged between the state, the private sector, and official peasant and labour organizations. Large numbers of Mexicans, however, find themselves outside or non-conformist with these former pillars of state corporatism.

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7The share of public expenditures dedicated to debt servicing increased 40% between 1983 and 1985, while social welfare expenditures dropped 26% (Nash, 1994).
8The GNP for 1982 was -0.5% and -4.7% in 1983 (Velázquez, 1992).
9Up until recent years, the Mexican political system remained remarkably stable during the twentieth century. This is partly owing to the corporatist/clientelist system of representation, created in the Cárdenas years (1936-1940) whereby the state controlled civil society through three major confederations: the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Workers’ Confederation, CTM), the Confederación Nacional de Campesinos (Peasants’ Confederation, CNC), and also a body for popular organizations, which includes groups as diverse as elite business personnel to residents of the poorer neighbourhoods.
A report published by the NGO Working Group on the World Bank has explored the extent to which structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have achieved their goals during the 1982-1994 period (Heredia and Purcell, 1994). While the World Bank claims the purpose of a SAP is to "restore sustainable economic growth and make lasting progress in alleviating poverty," the report finds that the opposite has occurred in Mexico (1994:2). Instead, Mexico has experienced rising poverty and growing social differentiation. The average rate of economic growth during the de la Madrid administration was zero and climbed only to 2.2% (just above population growth) during the Salinas administration (1994:3). Income distribution has become more highly skewed; in the period 1984-1990 the percentage of national income in the hands of the richest fifth of the population grew from 48.4% to 54.2% while the percentage of national income in the hands of the poorest fifth of the population fell from 5 to 4.3% (1994:8). During the Salinas administration, the poorest individuals subsisted on average incomes of less than US$ 350 while the number of billionaires rose from two to 24 (1994:10).

Public sector reforms implemented under the SAPs have included reducing public expenditures and privatizing or reforming state enterprises. Social spending in 1991 was below 1980 levels, especially in health and education. The number of state-owned enterprises declined from 1,155 in 1982 to 150 in 1994 (1994:4).

Financial sector reforms under the SAPs have meant removing controls on interest rates, privatizing and deregulating financial services, and drastically reducing the state's role in allocating credit. In terms of credit availability, development banks are obsolete, with the majority of credit channeled through commercial banks and at commercial rates. High interest rates have hurt domestic industries that compete with their foreign counterparts operating at much lower rates. Financial assets have become concentrated into "financial groups," who lend priority to corporate banking rather than the average

The Mexican post-revolution regime, based on this corporatist structure, has been dominated by one party through its entire history, the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional).
consumer. By 1994, foreign investment as a result of the financial reforms has increased; however, the majority was invested in portfolio investment. Furthermore, small producers had become marginalized by the financial system.

Labour market reforms applied under economic restructuring have attempted to cheapen labour by cutting real wages and restricting its mobility, without inciting massive unemployment. A Labour Congress report indicates that in 1991, 15% of the economically active population was unemployed, and over 40% was under-employed (1994:7). In 1992, 90% of the businesses that make up the Mexican Stock Exchange were executing lay-offs due to economic stagnation and the inability to compete in the international arena (1994:7). In 1993 alone, six thousand jobs were lost in the manufacturing sector (1994:8). The informal economy has mushroomed, conservatively estimated by the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Geografía, e Informática (National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information, INEGI) as employing one third of the labour force in 1994 (INEGI, 1995). A study by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM) claims that from the initiation of the Pact in December 1993 to May 1994, the minimum wage had increased 136% while the cost of the Basket of Basic Goods had grown by 371% (1994:8).

Trade reforms under the SAPs have included removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers, the elimination of subsidies to import-competing industries, and currency devaluations. The rapid liberalization of trade, as mentioned above, has resulted in a huge trade deficit (US$ 23 billion in 1993) (1994:5). Small domestic industries and producers have gone out of business, unable to compete with cheap imports after decades of state protectionism. The foreign debt, however, has not been reduced but has burgeoned, from US$ 86.23 billion in 1982 to over US$ 120 billion in 1992 (1994:6). Between 1989 and 1992, approximately US$ 15 billion left the country to service the debt. The appearance of economic stability was in part achieved by a relatively stable exchange rate since 1987 after massive devaluations and exchange-rate fluctuations in the early 1980s. By the end of
September 1994, however, the artificial overvaluation of the peso was estimated as high as 39% (Barry, 1995). This was made possible largely by the loans mentioned above on behalf of the U.S. and international financial institutions. The trade deficit was also being financed to a large degree by portfolio capital, an extremely unstable form of financing (Dussel Peters, 1996; Otero, 1995).

By artificially maintaining the peso, Mexico was able to hide its widening trade deficit, control inflation, initiate a degree of economic growth, and stabilize the peso throughout the Salinas administration. As opposed to the presidential elections in 1988, in 1994 the PRI's candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, triumphed by a more convincing margin. Four short months later, the policy of artificially upholding the currency was officially dropped, and on December 21, 1994, the peso plunged.¹⁰ In the months following the drastic currency devaluation, hundreds of small- and medium-sized businesses declared bankruptcy, unemployment skyrocketed, and inflation soared. The Secretaría de Hacienda (Ministry of Finance) reported that in the first trimester of 1995, 4,845 household heads lost their jobs per day (Cuéllar, 1995). As the true health of the economy became apparent, international financial institutions, the United States, and other industrialized countries rushed to provide Mexico with emergency aid in the form of new loans and credit packages in order to rescue the image of the free trade agenda for Latin America:

Mexico's creditors--including lenders, portfolio investors, and anyone exporting to Mexico--stood to benefit immediately from the various financial packages. The emergency assistance to Mexico was predicated on the belief that the Mexico's neoliberal economic model was fundamentally sound, although in need of better financial management (Barry, 1995:8).

¹⁰Throughout the Salinas administration, the peso was stabilized around N$ 3.50 to the American dollar. After the devaluation, it was worth almost 50% less: N$ 6.10, and continued to fluctuate, trading at N$8.00 to the dollar throughout February 1996. The presidency had been aware at least four months before the actual devaluation that something needed to be done; at that point the costs to the Mexican economy would have been minimized. It is argued, moreover, that a small circle of investors were tipped off before the devaluation took place. As a result, they were not only unaffected by the devaluation, but profitted greatly by later bringing dollars back into the country.
Such bailout measures occurred despite heavy opposition in the U.S. Congress and Senate. The new crisis that was triggered in the final days of 1994 has not been met with a change in government policy. On the contrary:

[it] has been confronted with the same kind of neoliberal medicine as that of 1982: more cuts in government spending; an increase in the value-added tax from 10% to 15%; increases of 35% to 50% in the prices of goods provided by state firms, such as electricity and gasoline; more privatizations of state companies; and wage increases, which average a mere 12%. Inflationary pressures are already high, and the economy is expected to have a negative “growth” rate of about 5% in 1995 (Otero, 1995: 322).

In April 1995, a study released by UNAM claimed that neoliberal economic policies were directly responsible for reduced purchasing power; a 1995 minimum wage in real terms was 2.2 times less than that of 1935 (La Jornada, 30 April 1995, p1). Similarly, the Labour Congress reported that 13 months after the 1994 devaluation, the price of the basket of basic goods had increased 93.9% (La Jornada, 9 February 1996, p53). The reforms since 1982 have radically transformed the Mexican economy: the movement of capital and investment across borders has been facilitated; interest rates have been maintained at high levels; state control over key resources has been mitigated; and labour has been both cheapened and disciplined.

2.2 THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Under a neoliberal development model, recent changes to agrarian policy have been explained by official sources as a necessary step toward “inserting” Mexico and its agricultural sector into the global market (Gordillo de Anda, 1990). The insertion of Mexico’s agricultural sector into the world market dates back to the 16th century; however, what has been changing under economic restructuring is the conditions under which this insertion takes place. Reforms under neoliberalism include the elimination of most food and agricultural input subsidies, food price controls, the opening of markets, the privatization of credit and technical assistance, and changes to agrarian reform legislation.
that allow for the privatization of previously inalienable, communally held ejido land (DeWalt, Rees, and Murphy, 1994). For the ejido sector, these measures follow two decades of heavy state intervention that attempted (and failed) to rescue an agricultural crisis that was over five decades in the making. This section provides a brief sketch of the past government policies that have played a considerable role in shaping the Mexican countryside and creating the agricultural crisis that emerged in the 1960s. This establishes the context for a discussion on the current policies under neoliberal economic restructuring.

2.2.1 The Persistence of the Peasantry

Capitalist development in Mexican agriculture has generated marked regional inequality and considerable diversification in the conditions of production for peasant households. The response of the peasantry to Mexico’s increasing economic integration into the global market has constituted one of the most exhaustive areas of theoretical debate in the Mexican social sciences. Within this classic debate, two key processes have been highlighted: proletarianization and depeasantization. Roger Bartra, from the descampenista (proletarianist) school has argued that the encroachment of capitalism into the agricultural sector necessarily marks the gradual dissolution of the peasantry (Bartra, 1974). On the other side of the fence, Gustavo Esteva from the campesinista (agrarian populist) school and others have argued that the peasantry resists full proletarianization, retaining the ‘class’ consciousness and cohesiveness of peasants (Esteva, 1978). Deere (1990) summarizes these two positions. According to the descampenistas, as the rural economy becomes progressively commoditized, inequality in access to the means of production among direct producers results in the growing concentration of means of production within a minority to the dispossession of the majority. Such processes result in the increased reliance of the impoverished peasantry on wage labour, which is purchased by wealthier peasants or capitalists. The campesinista perspective, however, argues that complete proletarianization of the peasantry does not occur in agrarian class structures
generated by dependent, "peripheral" capitalism because the peasantry is either functional
to capital or because "peripheral" capitalism cannot completely absorb the peasantry
converted into full proletariats.

This debate has generated numerous volumes and, it can be argued, an entire
academic sub-field in the Mexican social sciences. Two decades since the debate was
initiated, most academics would agree that a gradual erosion of peasantry has occurred,
owing to the conditions of capitalist development in Mexico. Wage earners maintain ties
to and help sustain the family peasant unit of production as a survival strategy in a climate
of scarce and insecure employment; this situation has served capitalism by making
available a supply of cheap labour with little bargaining power for both rural and urban
enterprises. Furthermore, decades since the debate began, the peasantry continues to
represent approximately one quarter of Mexico's population.11 Anthropologists have
enriched largely political economic debates by exploring the persistence of the peasantry
from a perspective that recognizes the cultural dimensions of what it means to be a
campesino (peasant). Despite the importance of discussions on class composition and the
politics of land tenure, it must not be forgotten that the persistence of the peasantry
reflects cultural contestations that occur as capital attempts to transform rural communities
(Escobar, 1995).

The Mexican state has played a key role in the maintenance of the peasantry. For
decades state discourse has reiterated the government's revolutionary commitment to
bring social justice to the countryside. In reality, the marginality of the peasant sector has
been 'codified' in legislation--exploited as a vehicle for capital expansion but contained to
prevent social unrest (Gates, 1993). The existence of an impoverished peasantry alongside
the capitalist mode of production has been characterized as "functional dualism" (de
Janvry, 1981). This situation can be defined as a functional integration of the peasant and

11In 1940 the rural population represented 64.9% of the total population, but by 1990 it declined to 27.5%.
This, however, does not signal a reduction in the population in the countryside; rural population has
grown 85% in the same period, from 12,756,000 people in 1940 to 23,594,000 in 1990 (Ramírez, 1994)
non-peasant sectors. Peasant agriculture provides cheap food to fuel industrialization, thus keeping urban wages down, as well as the cheap seasonal labour for commercial agribusiness. In the Mexican countryside, a capitalist, agro-exporting, highly-technified agriculture (1.8% of total producers) coexists with subsistence peasant agriculture using traditional techniques (86.6% of total producers) (Aranda, 1993).

This system of ‘functional dualism’ has its roots in the Revolution (1910-1917), whose rebel ranks were composed largely of disenfranchised, often indigenous peasants fighting for land and liberty. From the Revolution emerged the agrarian reform project, touted as one of the chief gains of the revolution. By 1988, there were 28,058 ejidos or agrarian communities, the two forms of land tenure enshrined in the 1917 constitutional article 27 (Gordilla de Anda, 1990 cited in Gates, 1993). This sector comprises a total of 3,070,906 individuals with rights to 95,108,066 hectares of land, nearly 50% of the grazing, agricultural, and forest land in Mexico (Gates, 1993). The agricultural potential of this sector is limited, however; only 12% to 21% of the land is suitable for agriculture and only 2.2% has access to irrigation (Arizpe and Botey, 1987; DeWalt, Rees, and Murphy, 1994). Although land redistribution established the basis for a more socially equitable farming sector, effective policies were never put in place to go beyond land redistribution (Gates, 1993). The state neglected the ejido sector, yet rewarded agribusiness (e.g. the construction of infrastructure appropriate to large-scale agriculture).

The greater part of redistributive land reform, which took place during the Cárdenas administration (1934-40), was an attempt not only to bring social justice to the countryside but also part of a modernization strategy to organize the working class into “meaningful units of production--ejidos in the countryside--both to feed the nation and to provide the foreign exchange necessary to develop national capital” (Sanderson, 1981:92). In 1940, agriculture generated 20.3% of the gross national product (Ramírez, 1994).

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12By 1910, 92% of the Mexican population was landless as a result of land concentration that accelerated during the Porfirian dictatorship (1876-1910) (Barry, 1995).
Following the Cárdenas administration, however, the Mexican state began to foster a dual-track policy toward the countryside, establishing clear divisions between *ejido* and private agriculture, with the former for subsistence production and the government’s rhetorical commitment to “social justice” and the latter for commercial gain and the fulfillment of productivity considerations (Gates, 1993). In this dual-track strategy, policies can be sorted into two categories. *Agricultural policies* have disproportionately benefited capitalist growers and ranchers, and have been aimed to boost production; *agrarian policies* have responded to demands for land redistribution and the need to retain political support in the countryside (Warman, 1978, cited in Gates, 1993, 1996).

2.2.2 The Agricultural Crisis

State policies extracted resources from agriculture to stimulate industry without reinvesting in the primary sector. Furthermore, the greater part of public investment was directed to large-scale capitalist agriculture. The initial benefits of Green Revolution technology formed the basis of the “economic miracle” with impressive productivity gains in the agricultural sector in the 1940s and 1950s. This was in large part owing to extensive public expenditure in order to install this technological and infrastructural package, mostly to the benefit of large-scale irrigated agriculture in the North and Northwest (Barry, 1995; Gates, 1993). Up until late 1960s, however, investment in the *ejido* sector was minimal. By the late 1960s it became apparent that the agricultural sector had lost its stamina. While between 1942 and 1964 the annual growth rate of agriculture (not including ranching) averaged 5.1%, between 1966 and 1970 it declined to 1.2% and to 0.2% between 1970 and 1974 (Ramírez, 1994). Not only had the initial gains of the Green Revolution reached a plateau, the impact of the state’s industrialization bias was being felt. The principal effects of this crisis included the monetarization of the peasant economy, the proletarianization and emigration of large contingents of the peasantry, and

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13 Between 1940 and 1979, irrigation works accounted for between 70 to 99.2% of government investment in the agricultural sector, concentrated in three key northern state: Sonora, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas (Barkin, 1990).
an extreme polarization of the economic and social structure of the countryside (Aranda, 1993).

Meanwhile, state agricultural policies of the 1960s began to internationalize the Mexican economy toward agro-exports and feed grains in response to international and domestic market forces (Gates, 1993; Otero, 1989; Sanderson, 1986). These began to reshape production to meet changing dietary patterns with increasing domestic demands for meat, poultry, and processed foods as well as international demands (mostly the U.S.) for cattle, fruits and vegetables. In turn this generated increased demand for certain goods for industrial processing and also forage crops (Barkin, 1990; Gates, 1993). As a result, modernized livestock production and feed grains began to displace subsistence crops such as corn and beans, while mechanized horticulture began to replace irrigated wheat production in the North. The four basic food crops in Mexico accounted for three quarters of total land area planted in 1940; by 1980 this figure had decline to less than one half (Barkin, 1990). By 1970, Mexico’s agricultural sector had converted from providing the foreign exchange necessary for industrialization to being a net importer of basic grains. It has been well documented that government incentives played a key role in this transformation of the countryside (Barkin, 1990; Gates, 1993; Sanderson, 1981). For example, depressed corn prices in order to keep food prices low and higher fixed prices for sorghum led commercial corn producers to switch crops (Barkin, 1990).

In the early 1970s, when the economic and political consequences of five decades of subsistence-sector neglect became more apparent in Mexico’s escalating agrarian crisis, the state responded with ‘patch-up’ policies to improve the productivity of the peasantry. The net result of these policies, however, resulted in regional polarization, the further marginalization of the peasantry, the deepening of the agricultural crisis, and the drastic enlargement of the often corrupt agricultural bureaucracy (Gates, 1993; Otero, 1989). This phase, beginning in 1970 and lasting until 1982 when cut short by fiscal restraint, was marked by a massive state presence in agriculture in response to declining food self-
sufficiency. In the peasant sector, policies were directed toward land redistribution and the modernization of the peasant sector during the Echeverría administration (1970-1976). Agrarian reform was revitalized, with ejido and communal land expanding from 70 to 85 million hectares between 1970 and 1979 (Zaragoza and Macías, 1980, cited in Gates, 1993). The agrarian bureaucracy gave birth to a plethora of new development agencies, commissions, and subcommissions, subsumed in the Proyecto de Inversiones Públicas para el Desarrollo (the Public Investment Project for Rural Development, PIDER) initiated in 1973. PIDER constituted the world’s largest rural development project funded by the World Bank (Gates, 1993). The expense of these reforms, their lack of success, and rising food imports threatened the project by the time López Portillo (1976-1982) took office. The discovery of massive oil reserves in 1977 when world prices were at an all-time high, however, allowed the government the foreign exchange necessary to continue importing basic grains and stave off the crisis.

In 1980, the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (Mexican Food System, SAM) aimed at the achievement of food self-sufficiency mainly by directing subsidies to small producers of basic grains in rain-fed areas (Gates, 1993). When the SAM was announced, the Mexican government promised to remain outside the GATT, continue state-led economic development, and manage its oil-resources more sustainably. This policy package “represented the government’s desire to reject Mexico’s dependent insertion in the world economy by using state-revenues from oil exports to ensure food self-sufficiency through revitalized small peasant production” (Otero, Preibisch, and Singelmann, 1994). Under the SAM, ejidatarios and other small producers were encouraged to produce basic grains rather than higher value cash crops through the following incentives: credit from the Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural (National Rural Credit Bank, BANRURAL); guaranteed prices; and agricultural insurance through the Aseguradora Nacional de Agricultura y Ganadería, (National Agency for Agricultural and Livestock Insurance, ANAGSA) (Gates, 1993). The Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares (National
Basic Foods Company, CONASUPO) also provided incentives for basic food production with the installation of stores throughout rural Mexico, dedicated to controlling the purchase of basic crops and distributing subsidized, popular foods. The agrarian reform law was modified in 1981 with the Ley de Fomento Agropecuario (Agricultural and Livestock Production Promotion Law, LFA). The most significant changes were 1) a broadened role for the Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, SARH) in setting national and local production goals and pinpointing under-utilized lands for expropriation; and 2) the establishment of the legal conditions for private capital in the ejido sector by allowing for productive associations between ejidatarios and private capitalists (Gates, 1993; Otero, Preibisch, and Singelmann, 1994).\textsuperscript{14}

Rather than generating an efficient expanded productive base, Gates (1993) argues that the statist approach under these two administrations created an institutionalized modern subsistence sector. It crippled peasant production autonomy, consolidated the ejido sector at the base of the ruling party’s structure through the bureaucratization of agriculture, and intensified the crisis. Like the “development” record for the period on a global scale, in Mexico “the agricultural crisis is in many ways the product of the very policies designed to alleviate it in that the modernization strategy pursued has effectively codified peasant marginality” (Gates 1993: 32).

2.2.3 Policy Reversal: Agriculture under Economic Restructuring 1982-1994

The de la Madrid Administration, 1982-1988

With the 1981 crash in oil prices and the ensuing debt crisis, the costly SAM was dropped and public sector spending in the ejido was greatly reduced. After two presidential administrations of heavy state intervention in the countryside and massive project funding, the de la Madrid administration embarked on debt negotiation, involving

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\textsuperscript{14}Such associations between private capital and ejidatarios were already in existence, although technically illegal.
fiscally austere structural adjustment policies in an overall framework of economic liberalization. As the restructuring measures began to take their toll, peasant producers were hurt by rising interest rates, soaring input prices, low guaranteed prices, falling international prices, and decreased public investment. Peasants producing at subsistence and infra-subsistence levels saw their purchasing power decrease 61% between 1982-1988 (Velázquez, 1992). While the agricultural sector had registered an annual growth rate of 4.7% from 1977-1981, during 1982-1987 that rate was 1.1% (Calva, 1988:12). Calva (1988) notes that between 1982 and 1986, public expenditure in agriculture fell 52.1%, agricultural credit was cut by 40%, and consumer prices increased while prices of agricultural goods fell. In this period, the guaranteed price for corn multiplied 37.6 times; however, the price of gasoline multiplied 82 times and tractors 64.3 times (Calva, 1988). The rapid withdrawal of state funding for rural development caused many ejidatarios to fall into debt as the government-sponsored, inefficient modernization projects collapsed (Gates, 1993). This period has been referred to as the "industry of disasters" due to the proliferation of corruption as agrarian bureaucrats, especially those employed by BANRURAL and ANAGSA planned schemes (e.g. crop insurance fraud) to defraud their agencies, often in conjunction with ejido authorities (Gates, 1993; Preibisch, field notes, 1995; Ramírez, 1994). While bureaucrats acted in defense of dwindling salaries, for many peasants fraud became an institutionalized coping strategy, "the only way to avoid repeated default and consequent ineligibility for credit" (Gates 1993:47).

This period also saw a deepening of social differentiation among both regions and producers. If federal transfers to state governments are compared, the de la Madrid years deepened regional polarization and the bimodal structure of agriculture by increasing government funds to those states where commercial agriculture is concentrated and decreasing the budget share of the poorer states where basic crop production prevails (Velázquez, 1992). Day labourers' salaries decreased 39% in real terms throughout the length of the decade, while the gross earnings of capitalist agribusinesses increased
substantially (Calva, 1988). Although at the end of the decade, there was a back-log of over 60,000 legal proceedings for land petitions, the de la Madrid administration further reduced the risk of expropriation for the private sector in agriculture by approving 99.8% of the certificates solicited to guard against expropriation of agricultural and livestock (López Monjardín, 1988).

By 1988, the crisis in the agricultural sector had reached alarming proportions. Between 1988 and 1989, its growth rate was negative. Imports of basic crops increased from 8.5 million tons in 1982 to 10 million tons in 1988, consuming growing sums of foreign exchange at a time when international market prices of key imports were rising (Gates, 1993).


During the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who assumed the presidency under highly contested elections in 1988, the neoliberal economic restructuring package initiated under de la Madrid administration was consolidated in a series of rapid, sweeping reforms. Of all the sectors of the Mexican economy targeted during the Salinas administration, agriculture was particularly subject to a number of far-reaching changes. State intervention in peasant production has largely been replaced by free-market rules: guaranteed prices are being phased out; subsidized agricultural inputs have been eliminated, and state marketing agencies are disappearing. The agrarian reform project has been terminated, to the extent that the ejido—a formerly inalienable, social institution—is open for private sale. Achieving food self-sufficiency, an elusive goal since the 1960s, has now been ‘officially’ abandoned to allow market forces, profitability, and productivity determine production (i.e. the purchase of cheap grains from abroad). “Inefficient” grain producers should meet international productivity levels through modernization, switch to higher value crops in which the country has “comparative advantage,” or leave agriculture completely (Marsh and Runsten, 1995).
The Salinas administration outlined its plan for the countryside in the Programa Nacional de la Modernización del Campo (National Modernization of the Countryside Program 1990-1994) which clearly defined that agricultural policy would be directed to efficient producers with productive potential. The fundamental aspects included: privatization of parastatal companies such as state-owned sugar mills, Tabacos Mexicanos (Mexican Tobacco, TABAMEX), Fertilizantes Mexicanos (Mexican Fertilizers, FERTIMEX), agroindustries controlled by CONASUPO, and technical assistance; restructuring of state institutions providing services to the agricultural sector; deregulation of trade through the elimination of tariffs and guaranteed prices; and decentralization, promoting the participation of state-level governments and producers in the planning and implementation of farm policy (Ramírez, 1994). These ‘modernization’ reforms continued to be framed in a context of fiscal austerity: public investment in the agricultural sector declined from 6.8% of total public spending in 1981 to 2.4% in 1992 (Ramírez, 1994).

Salinas’s initial efforts to modernize agriculture aimed at eliminating inefficiencies in the agricultural bureaucracies by massive privatization, through efforts to weed out corruption, and by restructuring their internal organization. Privatization took on a dizzying pace. In agriculture, the number of state-owned enterprises in this sector in 1982 was 94; by 1993 only ten remained (Barry, 1995). In 1987, the state-owned fertilizer company, FERTIMEX underwent major internal restructuring and began to adjust fertilizer prices to market standards; by 1990 it began the process of privatization (Ramírez, 1994). Although CONASUPO is still engaged in the marketing of some agricultural products, government policy promotes producer initiatives to take over such functions (Otero, Preibisch, and Singelmann, 1994). Since CONASUPO is no longer the sole importer of grains, its importance in the marketing of grains and oilseeds has been significantly reduced (Ramírez, 1994). Furthermore, CONASUPO will no longer absorb distribution and transportation costs as in the past; these will be charged to the producers,
so that this becomes an additional incentive for them to organize their own distribution efforts (Otero, Preibisch, and Singelmann, 1994).\footnote{The level of corruption within CONASUPO became public in a scandal involving former president Carlos Salinas’ brother, Raul Salinas, in February 1996. It was revealed that this government institution had distributed a number of food items in the countryside that were not fit for human consumption (e.g. radiation-contaminated corn, feed-grade beans). A special commission has been set up to investigate the matter.}

ANAGSA was liquidated in 1990, separating agricultural insurance from BANRURAL credit, and was replaced with AGORASEMEX, a new insurance agency that deals with low-risk clients only. BANRURAL underwent a major restructuring. Several branch offices throughout the country were closed and personnel liquidated.\footnote{The regional management of the states Tlaxcala, Morelos, Hidalgo, Puebla, and the Federal District is located in Puebla City. In 1990, there were 32 branches operating in these states; by 1992 only 15 remained. In the state of Puebla this involved the closing of three branches: Atlixco, San Martín Texmelucan, and Zacapoaxtlá (Ramírez, 1994:63).} BANRURAL’s budget was slashed by 81.4% from 1981 to 1991 (Ramírez, 1994). The restructuring planned to transform the institution “to become a normal banking institution after two decades of paternalistically supervising deficit production and [...] grant credit only to crops, regions, and producers that virtually guarantee an adequate return to investment” (Gates, 1993:51). However, under economic restructuring many medium and small producers had fallen into cartera vencida, or default with BANRURAL. Between 1988 and 1989 cartera vencida with the rural development bank grew 181.3%, and by 1989 a third of Mexico’s 3 million ejidatarios were in default (Gates, 1993; Ramírez, 1994). This inability to pay was largely the result of escalating interest rates in order to attract foreign investment; in 1988 the interest rate at BANRURAL reached its highest peak of the decade, at 84.3% (Ramírez, 1994). Under its new mandate, BANRURAL has slashed its clientele. High income producers that operated with BANRURAL will be transferred to private banks, and BANRURAL will deal exclusively with low resource producers that have productive potential. Those producers considered ‘high risk’ or ‘low productive potential’ and those facing cartera vencida will be left outside official credit.
Thus while Banrural provided credit for 7 million hectares at the beginning of the 1980s, by 1993 it only covered one million hectares (González and Salles, 1995).

These producers will be able to apply for credit under the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program, PRONASOL), announced by President Salinas on the first day he took office on December 1, 1988, with the objective of attacking Mexico’s extreme poverty in rural and urban areas. In its first phase, PRONASOL funds were responsible for the construction of health care facilities, the electrification of rural communities and urban squatter settlements, potable water and sewage projects, road projects, and low-income housing projects (Gates, 1993). By 1991, PRONASOL funds had reached 76% of the country’s municipalities (Ramírez, 1994). In times of fiscal restraint, PRONASOL funds represent a significant capital outlay by the state, which in 1991 represented 21.6% of total public expenditure (Ramírez, 1994). Critics argue that program has functioned as a important political strategy for the contentiously installed Salinas and the battered image of the PRI; PRONASOL beneficiaries grouped in “solidarity communities” throughout the republic are linked directly to the president for the distribution of funds (Cornelius, Craig and Fox 1994; Mackinlay, 1994; Otero, 1995). Many of the resources have been concentrated in opposition strongholds and the program has been dubbed “PRI nasol” (Dresser, 1991; Gates, 1993).

One of PRONASOL’s programs offers resources “a la palabra” (on word) when petitioned by a group of peasants organized in a solidarity committee. The general principles guiding PRONASOL include: community initiative; popular participation; shared responsibility; and transparency and efficiency in the management of resources (Gates, 1993). Once credit is approved it is handed out in cash and interest is not charged. To receive funds the following year, the original amount must be repaid. Those who fail to pay have their names placed on a public list in the community. In the countryside, PRONASOL Funds for Production reached more than four thousand peasants in 1991 (Salinas, 1992 cited in Ramírez, 1994). Nonetheless, PRONASOL funds directed for
production in 1991 in real terms represented 7.5% of the credit exercised by BANRURAL in 1980 and have been criticized by producers as an inopportune form of credit for production (Ramírez, 1994).

PRONASOL is not linked to any other institution involved in the agricultural sector nor to any other program of technical assistance, services, or inputs. The institutions that formerly offered these services, like BANRURAL, are undergoing serious institutional reform. The Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hídricos (Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, SARH) has seen its budget drastically cut to the extent that between 1981-1991 the expenditure and investment exercised by this institution decreased by 79.5% (Ramírez, 1994). One of the major initiatives currently promoted by the SARH is the privatization of technical assistance, which will be monitored by a para-state enterprise, Sistema Nacional de Extensión (The National System of Extension, SNE).

Along with the privatization or fundamental restructuring of state institutions involved in agriculture, subsidies to crop and inputs prices have been eliminated. Such steps were necessary to comply with the entrance of Mexico into GATT (1986) and more so, the NAFTA (1994). From 1990 on, only corn and beans are still subject to guaranteed prices, a policy which will be phased out in a 15 year period under the NAFTA. In the past, guaranteed prices tended to be above international prices, thus introducing an important distortion in the market sustaining producers that had higher production costs, a policy clearly inconsistent with the trend toward globalization and North American integration in which the main logic is increased efficiency and international competitiveness (Otero, Preibisch, and Singelmann, 1994). Another market distortion introduced by support prices involved crop choices as some farmers tended to adopt subsidized crops in lands that could be better used for other, more profitable, crops. Corn provides a good example in this case. Crops which were formerly displacing corn (e.g. sorghum) are now being displaced by that very crop since it is one of the only basic foods still protected while
the markets for most food and feed grains have been deregulated (la Peña and Morales, 1994). Corn production in Mexico for the 1991 season soared, with 2.4 million producers cultivating corn in the spring-summer season, and 48% of Mexico’s total crop area dedicated to corn (Appendini, 1994). As Appendini has pointed out, such figures reflect the paradoxical ways in which the agricultural sector is responding to free-market incentives. Rather than switch to those crops in which Mexico supposedly has a comparative advantage, large farmers who formerly grew ‘protected’ crops that have lost their profitability in the liberalized economy have switched to corn. Reliance on corn will come to an end, however; the Mexican government has negotiated a gradual liberalization period. Import licenses of corn have been replaced with a 215% tariff which will be reduced moderately. At the same time, Mexico will create a quota for tariff-free imports which will begin at 2.5 million tons per year and increase by 3% annually (Appendini, 1994). Thus it is probable that large commercial farmers will gradually abandon corn production and switch to new possibilities offered within the new free-trade framework.

Canceling the policy of guaranteed prices makes sense in free market terms only if other variables are left out of the discussion. Unlike Mexico, this country’s two principal partners in the NAFTA agreement have historically enjoyed pro-production government subsidies, protection policies, and credit programs. In Mexico, the rapid erosion of guaranteed prices meant that in 1989, the difference between the guaranteed price index for agricultural products and price index for agricultural inputs meant a real loss of 35.5%

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17 CONASUPO still commercializes a substantial part of Mexico’s maize harvest, keeps support prices above international standards, and conserves non-tariff barriers for the import of corn and beans (Encias, 1994).

18 Corn production in Mexico simply cannot compete by international standards. Mexico’s partners in the hemispheric commercial opening are two of the world’s major grain exporting countries, who both practice aggressive subsidy policies to producers and are looking to clear grain surpluses (Encias, 1992). At the same time, the American government offers incentives for the Mexican government to increase grain purchases by extending credits such as the Commodity Credit Corporation’s GSM-102 program (Appendini, 1994). For peasant corn producers, many functioning at infrasubsistence and subsistence levels, they will continue to operate at a loss. During the first year following the heterodox adjustment strategy in 1987, the percentage of corn producers operating at a loss grew from 43 (1987) of the total to 65 (1988) (Hewitt, 1994).
for producers (Ramírez, 1994). Another point of contention is how ‘free’ the new trade framework actually is, in terms of non-tariff barriers erected by the U.S. to restrict the influx of Mexico’s ‘competitive’ goods, such as oranges or tomatoes.

At the end of 1993, the Salinas administration introduced a new program—Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo (Program for Direct Support to the Countryside)—designed to cushion the blow of a liberalized price scheme for producers of basic grains. The program’s acronym, PROCAMPO, literally means, “Pro-countryside.” Announced in 1993, it came as a precursor to the elimination of all subsidies in 1994. PROCAMPO replaces the guaranteed pricing policy with a fixed, per hectare payment to those producers who had been cultivated one of nine basic crops since 1990: corn, beans, wheat, cotton, soybeans, sorghum, rice, safflower, and coffee. PROCAMPO resources are not contingent on the continued cultivation of these crops; rather it is hoped they act as an incentive to switch production to those crops which are more “suited” to the land, according to market signals. PROCAMPO is scheduled to have a 15 year life span, with resources gradually decreasing in the last ten years (SARH, n.d.).

The stated goal of the project was to improve the well-being of society, improve production, and take better care of the environment (SARH, n.d.). To fulfill the first of these objectives, PROCAMPO was designed to reach the most marginalized rural producers, most notably the 2.2 million ejidatarios who do not receive the benefits of guaranteed prices since they produce at subsistence levels. Secondly, production would improve by not tying support to basic grains. Finally, PROCAMPO would curb environmental degradation by raising rural living standards so producers could opt for other alternatives such as “forest preservation” (SARH, n.d.:7).

Critics maintain that PROCAMPO cannot fulfill its objectives nor solve the major problems facing peasant producers. Although PROCAMPO’s resources may sound significant, the outlay of funds per hectare in 1993-1994 worked out to N$ 1.7 per hectare per day, hardly enough to cover the costs of production let alone combat poverty, brake
rural emigration, stimulate ecological preservation, and promote productive reinvestment (Rudiño, 1993). With PROCAMPO, the government will spend less in 1994 in the countryside than was channeled in 1993 (González Perez, 1993).

PROCAMPO has its political benefits. Like PRONASOL, the substitution of guaranteed prices with direct government supports removes a hidden subsidy and replaces it with a politically charged one. In line with the neoliberal package, PROCAMPO facilitates the implementation of the NAFTA; the elimination of guaranteed prices and protectionism against American corn imports was a precursor to the hemispheric contract (Badillo, 1993). It is not coincidental that PROCAMPO appeared at a time when the NAFTA was under examination by the American Congress, and ten months before Mexico’s 1994 presidential elections. In sum, PROCAMPO appears to be another welfare program for the millions of peasant farmers left out of a development model that targets only those producers considered ‘efficient’ according to the dictates of a global market. It is also questionable whether PROCAMPO should be conceived as compensation to a retreating state; on the contrary, it expands the state’s information gathering capabilities (Goldring, 1996a).

The most radical policy reform under the Salinas administration that opened the countryside to market relations were changes in 1992 to Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution, which allows for the privatization of those lands that had been designated unalienable under the Revolutionary agrarian reform package. Article 27 committed the state to redistribute land, to prevent excessive land concentration, and to demonstrate a clear measure of social responsibility towards Mexico’s rural society. The key provisions of the new law (passed February, 1992) announce the end to the government’s obligation to land redistribution and the strict prevention of land concentration, allowing private investors to make capital investments in their properties without risk of expropriation (i.e. irrigation, improve pasture); grant ejidatarios the legal right to sell, rent, sharecrop, or mortgage their land parcels after they are titled and certified; and encourage the formation
of joint "associations" with private investors. The new law also allows for direct foreign investment in the ejido (Cornelius, 1992). Within the framework of Salinas's overall rapid strategies for transforming one of the world's most protected economies to one that is increasingly market-led, the inalienable forms of land tenancy in the agricultural sector stood as an anachronism.

The ultimate goal in Salinas' legislation was to attract private investment into the 'unproductive' peasant sector (Cornelius, 1992). What this means for the social composition of the countryside is only starting to emerge. In terms of joint ventures among the private sector and ejidatarios, the success rate has been sketchy. One of the first of these associations began in 1990 in the state of Nuevo León between ejidatarios and Gamesa, a corporation mainly devoted to food processing (Gates, 1993). The Vaquerías project involved the collective production of beans on 25 thousand hectares of irrigated land, funded equally between the company and the government. By April of 1995, in the process of dissolving the "society in participation", the ejidatarios began planting sorghum without the support of their private partner and investor, Alberto Santos (La Jornada, April 10, 1995, p.60). In terms of ejido privatization, PROCEDE--the land certification program that is the first step towards privatization--has had overwhelming acceptance in the ejido sector. Social scientists working in the Mexican countryside have predicted the following scenarios under the reformed Article 27, some of which are now being observed: an increase in land concentration and the growth of land speculation as an impoverished peasantry sells their land at rock-bottom prices in times of crisis to more privileged ejidatarios, private investors, or agribusinesses; growing semi- to full proletarianization; and a massive exodus from the countryside to the city of the

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19 Shortly after the law was passed, the government put PROCEDE (the Program for Certification of Ejido Rights and Titling of Urban Lots) in motion. Furthermore, a ministry was created, the Procuraduría Agraria (The Agrarian Attorney General's Office--PA) as the administrative body largely responsible for executing PROCEDE, as well as adjudicating land tenure and resolving potential disputes in the countryside (Goldring 1996a). The processes involved in PROCEDE mark the first step towards land privatization, since the land is measured by (INEGI) and land certificates are handed out.
dispossessed peasantry (Gates, 1993; Otero, 1991). Land privatization—whether it occurs among *ejidatarios* or with the incursion of the private sector—will result in increased numbers of landless peasants; these will be joined by those living on the increasingly marginalized, unwanted lands (such as those dedicated to basic grains) to form the cheap labour force which is further enhanced as Mexico’s ‘comparative advantage’.

The reforms continue to be a point of contention. Among the demands of the largest national popular movement in the countryside, *El Barzón*\(^2\), and the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army for National Liberation, EZLN) is the rescinding of the reforms. The reformed Article 27 was one of the only subjects proposed by EZLN for the 1996 peace-talk discussions that was rejected by the government.

As the above discussion has pointed out, the application of neoliberal policies in the agricultural sector occurred more vigorously under the Salinas administration. This has freed the sector from two decades of heavy state intervention that failed to reverse the agricultural crisis. For the majority of producers, however, sudden demands to face up to a global market reality come as a harsh wake-up call. The bulk of small and medium producers concentrated in the *ejido* sector have emerged in the neoliberal framework with the cards stacked against them: little or no access to effective credit; in states of bankruptcy or on the verge of declaring it; buying dollar-priced inputs with a devalued currency; and facing the same or worse marketing networks. Furthermore, state protections of their rural patrimony have been lifted. The following chapter explores these implications in terms of gender.

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\(^2\) *El Barzón* (the yoke) is a lobby group demanding the restructuring of the agricultural debt and in general, bankruptcy across all sectors (even consumer debt). *El Barzón* originally began as a social movement of small private producers and *ejidatarios* of Autlán and the region south of Jalisco, who organized themselves to protest *cartera vencida* (La Jornada del Campo, October 26, 1993). *El Barzón* now has over one million members, and rural and urban contingents are about equal in number.
After more than a decade of restructuring, Mexico's economic crisis has not been ameliorated. On the contrary, it has been exacerbated, manifesting new dimensions and reaching unforeseen proportions. As was shown in Chapter 2, the countryside—a specific site to be ‘modernized’ under the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994)—has witnessed an intensification of the agricultural and agrarian crises. Feminist social scientists and field workers have started to generate a body of literature that assesses economic restructuring in the agricultural sector in terms of gender, highlighting that rural women are experiencing some of the most negative consequences of growing economic and social inequality. The diversity of these responses among regions, communities, households, and individuals is great, as conditions of class, regionality, ethnicity, and age interact with gender. This limited, but growing body of research has given visibility to a number of processes that are crucial to understanding the Mexican countryside and have emphasized the integral role of gender in capitalist accumulation and the latest round of restructuring.

Recent research points to the deepening of the feminization of poverty in rural areas, citing a number of socioeconomic indicators which show that women are disproportionately affected by growing impoverishment due to the historical cheapening of their labour power, devaluation of their domestic non-waged labour, and the structural disadvantages they face in general terms as related to the subordination of their gender. The feminization of poverty is manifest in the extension and intensification of women’s domestic work under structural adjustment; the growing incorporation of women into low-wage sectors of the economy as peasant households diversify their sources of income; and
the rise in female-headed households as adult men migrate for indefinite periods of time to the United States.

This chapter reviews literature on rural transformations and gender in the Mexican countryside. As such, it explores three main fields of research. The first section looks at the introduction of gender into debates on the peasantry and literature on the peasant household. The second main section looks at government policy and structured gender inequality in the countryside. The final section looks at the gendered processes occurring in the countryside during the current round of economic restructuring.

3.1 Bringing Gender into the Debate

Since the 1970s, rural promotoras (social workers), organized peasant women, and social scientists have called for the inclusion of gender in debates on the Mexican countryside. In the international sphere, women’s exclusion from rural development initiatives was increasingly coming under focus by the end of the 1960s. The publication of Ester Boserup’s (1970) *The Role of Women in Economic Development* often marks the beginning of this debate. Following Boserup’s landmark volume, the study of gender and development broadened into a significant, multidisciplinary body of literature (see Fernández-Kelly 1989:617). The years 1975-1985 were designated the Decade for Women by the United Nations, and governments and international organizations opened branches in their institutions dedicated to ‘women and development’. Two important phenomenon that emerged in the early 1980s also favoured increased visibility of the work feminists had been doing: the progressive loss of food self-sufficiency in many Third World countries and the decline in public spending for social services under the debt crisis (Léon, 1987, cited in Escobar, 1995).

Boserup’s influential study convincingly argued that the development literature had ignored women’s contribution to the economy. Boserup and those who took up her work placed emphasis on the need to ‘integrate’ women into development, according to a liberal feminist position (Phillips, 1990). It was believed that women’s status would improve
through their improved access to the 'benefits' of 'modernization', such as Green Revolution technology. Gender inequality was rooted in women being 'left out' of 'productive' work; the solution lay in increased access to birth control, the labour market, and education. These debates, in essence, constituted a "modernized patriarchy," as efforts were directed to integrating women into development without questioning capitalist 'development' itself and the role of gender therein (Escobar, 1995; Fernández Kelly, 1989).

This approach lost credibility when it became apparent that women’s status had not improved but deteriorated in most countries throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Critics claimed Boserup’s approach ignored the class processes of changing social relations of production and ownership of the means of production within which technological change is embedded (Benería, 1980; Benería and Sen, 1981). Rather than suffer from a lack of integration, "the masses of Third World women are indeed integrated [...] but at the bottom of an inherently hierarchical and contradictory structure of production and accumulation" (Benería, 1980: 236).

Critiques such as these formed part of a dialogue occurring between feminism and Marxism in the 1970s. Marx and Engels had assumed that the elimination of private property and women’s participation in commodity production, made possible by industrialization, would set the preconditions for their emancipation (Benería and Sen, 1981). At first, Marxist feminists of the 1970s were making similar claims. Like Boserup, ‘integration’ would give women an access to their own wage, and thus increasing independence. In peasant studies, it was argued that women’s exodus from peasant modes of production and their integration into capitalist relations of production would lead to a significant improvement in their status (Wilson, 1985). Research on women’s

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1Fernández Kelly writes: “Almost three decades earlier modernization theory had explained Third World backwardness as an effect of shared cultural and psychological inadequacies [...] In the 1970s students of gender and development invoked similar explanations for women’s subordination, and saw the path to upgrade their social condition in liberal notions of self-determination and equal opportunity in the labour market” (1989: 619).
incorporation into paid work throughout Latin America, that had been rising increasingly since the 1970s confirmed the opposite. Women were entering the labour market to be placed in further conditions of subordination (Arizpe, 1989; Benería and Sen, 1981; Escobar, 1995; Nash, 1985). The devaluation of women’s work in the domestic sphere had been extended into the workplace by clustering women in relatively few niches in the occupational structure that were seen as extensions of their domestic roles; their jobs were often poorly paid and labour intensive; and finally, their wages were seen as complementary to those of a male breadwinner (Elson, 1992; Fernández Kelly, 1989). This debate took center stage with the relocation of manufacturing to lesser economically advanced countries under global economic restructuring, since the work forces for these enterprises were “feminized” (see Fernández Kelly, 1983; 1989; Fröbel et al., 1981; Nash and Fernández Kelly, 1983; Safa, 1981; Sklair, 1990). Massive capital transfers to the South also coincided with migration from these countries to advanced industrial countries, a source of cheaper labour that could also cheapen the domestic workforce of advanced industrial economies (Fernández Kelly, 1989; Sharma, 1995).

Research on recent global economic restructuring has focused on gender as an integral part of this process, going beyond world systems and new international division of labour theories (Fernández Kelly, 1989; Nash, 1994). These Marxist-based debates have done so by including the household as a site of analysis building on social scientists like Deere and Léon (1981) and Mies (1988) (Cebotarev, 1988; Fernández Kelly, 1989). These analyses specify households:

as loci where the articulation of modes of production actually takes place. Households may be conceptualized as flexible entities encompassing not one but several mechanisms for gaining access to resources through subsistence activities and paid employment. [...] The apportionment of labour power to interlocking realms of production occurs primarily on the basis of gender. It is impossible to understand the concept of articulation without relating it to definitions of womanhood and manhood, and to the roles played by men and women in the broader economy. [...] The salient implication of this analysis is that domestic units provide an economic
substratum that enables the replication of unequal economic exchanges in outward-oriented and overlapping circles of production (Fernández Kelly, 1989: 630).

Thus domestic units, organized on gender, act as the first layer on which relations of unequal exchange are founded (Fernández Kelly, 1989).

3.1.1 A House Divided: Gender Subordination and the Peasant Household

Refusing to recognize domestic work as ‘real work’ legitimates the process by which capitalist classes do not absorb the actual costs of the reproduction of the labour force (Benería, 1980; Fernández Kelly, 1989; Wilson, 1985). The contribution of domestic work becomes more marked in agriculturally-based economies where the degree of production needed for the household maintenance is higher than in those where a good portion of home production has been commoditized and rely heavier on the wage (Benería and Sen, 1981). Contemporary Marxist feminists that focus on the domestic sphere often include an exploration of subsistence sectors to underscore the importance of these two forms of production to accumulation. They pick up on work from 19th century Marxists, particularly that of Luxembourg (1951) who argued the importance of the “third market’ of subsistence producers in the household economy as a vital element in capitalist accumulation (Nash, 1994). Within Latin America, the campesinista/ descampesinista debate that dominated the social sciences throughout the 1970s resisted a specific analysis of gender relations (Arizpe, 1992; Lara, in press). Anthropologists using Chayanov’s (1974) concepts, however, began to break the lethargy of debates on the peasantry in search of new concepts and categories to explain household reproduction in times of crisis (Appendini, 1992). The work of Carmen Diana Deere in Peru, Magdalena de León in Columbia, and María de los Angeles Crummett in Mexico, argued that the persistence of the peasantry in times of greater precariousness can be explained by the gendered division of labour that often sustains peasant household participation in multiple income-generating activities (Wilson, 1985).
Within the household, the social and biological reproduction of the group and the maintenance of production and consumption cycles are crystallized; here, gender and age relations become synthesized and articulated (D’Aubeterre, 1995). The peasant household is also a cultural space in which peasants demonstrate their values, their traditions, their beliefs, their relationships with others, their conception of life and themselves (Zapata and López, 1993). It cannot be recognized as an ideal unit of cooperation, but as a contradictory nucleus which brings together both elements of cohesion and solidarity as well as tensions and conflicts (González, 1988). The household:

is the space which not only produces the material conditions indispensable to satisfy the primary necessities of its members, it is also the space where shared strategies are articulated by its members that make the continuity of the family possible. This continuity can be oriented differently according to the socioeconomic strata of the family and can be based in internal forms of authority of the sexual division of labour that rest in cultural and ideological codes that have their own reproductive dynamic (Zapata and López, 1993: 71, my translation).

Reproduction strategies employed by household members are conditioned by their relationship to the means of production and the organization of the family structure according to gender, age, level of education. The distribution of activities within the domestic unit is not equal. There is a rigid gender division of labour in which peasant women are exclusively responsible for the work of reproduction, which includes those activities that contribute to the reproduction and maintenance of the family labour force (Arizpe and Botey, 1987; Deere and Léon, 1987; Zapata and López, 1993). Domestic work includes:

the socialization of children (transmission of values; customs; beliefs; ideology); food processing; cleaning the home; hygiene of minors; health care of its members; and the physical and emotional care that each human being requires in order to develop themselves in a social context. Likewise, tasks related to the production of goods and services for the market must be considered (Zapata and López, 1993: 72).

2The term household refers to a production and consumption unit, whereas the term ‘family’ is limited to biological and social reproduction functions (Pepin-Lehalleur and Rendón, 1985).
Although in peasant communities throughout Mexico both men and women engage in productive activities, the gender division of labour in reproductive activities is homogenous: adult men rarely participate in domestic work (Arizpe, 1989; Arizpe and Botey, 1987; Deere and Léon, 1981; Velázquez, 1992; Zapata and López, 1993). This holds true despite the fact a clear distinction can be made between biological reproduction and daily family maintenance (Benería and Sen, 1981). Women’s participation in productive activities occurs according to the organization of field work, the social strata to which members of the household belong, the region in which they live, and socio-demographic factors (Marroni, 1995). In rural Mexico, the work day of rural women greatly exceeds that of their male counterparts, with women working four to five hours longer (Deere, 1987; Robles et. al, 1993). Furthermore, women’s workday in agrarian societies often exceeds that of women in urban areas and their work is more strenuous (Deere and Léon, 1987; Stephen, 1991).

Women’s overwhelming responsibility for reproduction is deeply inscribed upon the cultural definitions of womanhood and manhood. To some degree within all classes in Mexico, and especially in low-income groups, motherhood is the assumed primary adult gender role and has enormous symbolic power (Logan, 1992; Martin, 1989; Radcliffe and Westwood, 1993; Stevens, 1973). The Latin American cultural practice of distinctly defining the realms of each sex is well known in Mexico (Jelin, 1986). Not unlike other patriarchal cultures, the range of roles available to women is narrow; in Mexico as throughout Latin America, “women are recognized and valued only as mothers” (Bunster, 1983). The veneration of motherhood is strongly reinforced by the religious ideals of the pervasive Catholic church. The cult of ‘Marianismo’ exists to varying degrees throughout Latin America, which idealizes the Virgin Mary as women’s primary gender

In many parts of Latin America, rural women’s participation is greatest among the land-poor and/or the poorer strata of the peasantry. This is often related to the absence of adult male labour due to temporary migration, the lower opportunity cost of women in the labour market, and the high extent of proletarianization in these sectors (Deere and Léon, 1987).
model (Concoran-Nantes, 1993; Stevens, 1973). The powerful image of Mary as life-giver in Latin America, however, is counter-posed by Mary the self-sacrificing, chaste mother. As Stevens (1973) suggests, the role outlined by marianismo--semi-divine, morally superior, and spiritually stronger than men--is underscored by abnegation and tolerance of male-inflicted suffering. This duality suggests that the power women possess due to the symbolic connotations of reproduction has been countered and controlled by associating other characteristics with the maternal archetype. The image of the self sacrificing mother is thus an expression of male ideological control (Bustos, 1980; cited in Martin, 1989). Interestingly enough, although the cult of Marianismo is distinctly Latin American, the ideal of the nurturing, pure, and sacrificing mother is a universal archetype (Bartra, 1993; Bunster, 1985). The ways in which patriarchy plays itself outside in society clearly depends on a variety of social, historical, cultural, and economic factors. As Ximena Bunster has pointed out, whatever the roots of this cultural pattern in Latin America, machismo, like its counterpart, marianismo, “is obviously a Latin American manifestation of global patriarchy, whereby males enjoy special privileges within the society and within the family and are considered superior to women” (1985:299).

3.1.2 Restructuring and Reorganization

When peasant economies have difficulties meeting their subsistence needs, the household undergoes re-organization. With the growing immiseration of the peasant economy under economic crises, women’s work has expanded further into the so-called ‘public’ sphere, becoming more heterogeneous; however, this trend has not been accompanied by a similar tendency with men entering the reproductive-domestic sphere (Arizpe, 1989; Deere and Léon, 1987; Marroni, 1994). For example, women compensate for male absences in production, labour force participation, and by holding community offices when there is a shortage of male labour as men migrate in search of work (Arizpe, 1989; Arizpe and Botey, 1987; D’Aubeterre, 1995; Deere and Léon, 1987; Zapata and López, 1993). Men, however, do not share the reproductive load when there is a shortage
of female labour as daughters go to school or migrate (Arizpe, 1989; Marroni, 1994). In order to recognize the multiplicity of 'invisible' tasks women execute within and outside the household, Tiano (1985) has called for re-conceptualizing the private-public distinction as a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

The current asymmetry in the internal dynamics of the household, both cause and effect of women's subordination, results advantageous for capital's search for cheap labour supplies (Arizpe, 1988). Not only is women's work devalued and thus deserving of a lower wage, women continue to reproduce the labour force without remuneration under progressively deteriorating conditions. Domestic work is a survival strategy that has allowed for the conservation and reproduction of the peasant economy in the framework of capitalist relations of production; it is indispensable for the preservation of the domestic unit in periods of crisis (Zapata and López, 1993).

Like past crises, recent neoliberal economic restructuring has not had equal impacts among household members. As Benería (1992) notes:

> the profound restructuring of the Mexican economy has been accompanied by a parallel reorganization of daily life in the area of reproductive as well as productive activities, with specific gender dimensions that make the distribution of the burden of survival among household members unequal (84).

A substantial body of research has shown that the burden of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) falls harder upon poor urban woman and landless and land-poor rural women since they are the administrators of low-income households (Bakker, 1994; Elson, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Stephen, 1991). SAPs place the bulk of adjustment on the household by dissolving government subsidies on goods and services (electricity, public transport, basic foodstuffs) and cutting public services (education, health). Domestic work undergoes transformations under austerity: diets change, families eat less (often women), more starch is added to diets, processed foods are no longer purchased but made from scratch at home, firewood is gathered to replace gas, etc. SAPs, however, assume that households are sites
of equality and mutual cooperation. For example, in theory, SAPs assume households will modify their expenditures away from luxury goods such as cigarettes and alcohol in times of austerity. Elson (1992) points out, however, that there is a great deal of evidence from around the world showing that men tend to maintain a personal allowance for these items. Women, who are in charge of administering basic needs, often do not have control over cash resources, even when they are their own (Benería and Roldán, 1987).

Feminist researchers have come to the conclusion that it is precisely the existence of women, especially rural women, that has permitted the Mexican government to execute structural adjustment schemes (Benería and Feldman, 1992; Elson, 1992; Zapata and López, 1993). SAPs, an integral part of current restructuring, conceal and exclude the gender-specific consequences of 'adjustments', assuming that (women's) unpaid labour is infinitely elastic and able to adapt (Elson, 1992). Two events that have had significant influences on the worsening of the situation in the Mexican countryside were the heterodox stabilization Pact that went into vigor in the last few months of 1987 (González and Salles, 1995), and the economic crisis following the peso devaluation in December 1994.

Neoliberal policies have caused very dramatic regional effects with the development of capitalist agriculture in certain export crops as well as the destruction of peasant agriculture and the loss of food self-sufficiency. As peasant households increasingly depend less on agricultural production and more on wages and off-farm income, women have taken up additional paid and unpaid work. Two themes which are explored in detail in this chapter are the feminization of agricultural labour markets and the feminization of subsistence agriculture. The first refers to the unprecedented entrance of women into new and existing labour markets as a form of cheaper labour (Aranda, 1993; González, 1994; Marroni, 1994). Labour market activity often means an aggravation of the traditional forms of gender oppression women face: their responsibility for child care, sexual harassment on the job, etc. (Aranda, 1993). The second trend refers to the
incorporation of generally adult males and young girls from subsistence-based communities into international and national labour markets, forcing adult women to assume broader responsibilities in agricultural production and a greater share of the reproductive burden (Aranda, 1988; Arizpe, 1988; Zapata and López, 1993).

Some researchers have called for 'gender sensitive' policies that recognize the gender biases in restructuring (Bakker, 1994; Elson, 1992). These debates, however, thus imply that unequal gender impacts are accidental rather than integral to the current round of restructuring (Brodie, 1994). On the contrary, the new version of “modernization” is not a neutral process:

but one that is shaped by the forces of accumulation [...] In a system that makes use of existing gender hierarchies so as to generate and intensify inequalities, women tend to be placed in subordinate positions at the different levels of interaction between class and gender. For the poorer women, the implication is, overwork and exploitation relative to the exploited men of their class. For higher classes and strata of women, concentration on reproductive work generally means greater economic dependence on men (Beneria and Sen, 1980:247).

The lack of political will to address gender inequality on behalf of the state is clearly reflected in the absence of effective policies to this regard.

3.1.3 State Responses to Household Challenges

With the growing immiseration of both poor urban and rural households under neoliberal restructuring, international financial organizations have ear-marked greater portions of loans to Mexico to be spent on ameliorating poverty, especially in the rebel state of Chiapas. Federal and State governments are responsible for channeling these funds into programs for the poor. The most high-profile program in the countryside is PRONASOL, created by the Salinas administration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, PRONASOL attempts to compensate for reductions in public spending in a more transparent manner than in the past (i.e. less room for corruption).
Mujeres en Solidaridad (Women in Solidarity, MUJSOL) has been created within the Solidarity program to "stimulate the organization of women's groups with the goal of implementing productive projects directed by participants in their own community" (Robles et al., 1993:31, my translation). The only mention of women's subordination and its specific conditions under the crisis is alluded to in one of PRONASOL's objectives: "to promote actions that tend to facilitate the solution of the daily problematic facing women such as child care, food preparation, and attention to the sick, with ends of strengthening their participation in productive activities" (cited in Aranda, 1993: 197). Critics argue that rather than point out the origin and/or the mechanisms of gender subordination or attempt to resolve these issues the program encourages women to search for ways to fulfill their traditional roles (Aranda, 1993).

Rural women are thus treated in a general manner under PRONASOL, as any other marginalized interest group who must "organize" to apply for funds. Should rural women organize, however, it is not certain they will receive funds. In the past, groups have had to ask for assistance from high-level functionaries within the PRI's peasant organizations for funds. Rural women from some regions face additional challenges in such a scenario, since they are handicapped by their lack of representation in the highest positions of local authority (Ejido Commissariat, Municipal President, etc.). Furthermore, in the cases where popular movements have asked for funds, a mechanism has been created whereby resources are channeled to those groups that have been co-opted by the government.

Neighbourhood committees have begun to compete for PRONASOL benefits, and many grassroots participants are moved to political action (in favour of the PRI) by the

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4 In some communities women have held positions of representation such as the Ejido Commissariat. Relative to men, however, women are still highly under-represented in positions of local authority.

5 Popular movements: in contrast to 'social movements', which can emerge from any sector of the population around any particular social issue or perspective, 'popular movements' emerge from the disenfranchised or marginalized sectors of a population. In urban areas, popular movements involve strong residential or neighbourhood ties. In the countryside, demands often involve specific pieces of land or resource tracts to which they are trying to gain access to, or agricultural issues such as obtaining productive inputs and credits (Logan, 1990; Stephen, 1989).
prospect of material benefits for their neighbourhood (Dresser, 1991:20). In the process, the government is appropriating the notion of citizenship and defining it in such a way that good citizenship means participating in the neighbourhood committees linked to the official party, which in turn means more efficient access to services (Craske, 1993). This reinforces considering services as a privilege and not a right; "if the services do not arrive, it is not a problem of bad government but the fault of bad citizens" (Craske, 1993). The new discourse of citizenship is not unique to Mexico, but a trend accompanying neoliberalism, whereby previous definitions of the common good are replaced with definitions such as 'efficiency' that privilege the "free" market (Brodie, 1994). In such a climate:

The new common good is one which promotes efficiency and competition. In turn, the good citizen is one who recognizes the limits and liabilities of state intervention, and instead, works longer and harder in order to become self-reliant (Brodie, 1994:57).

Increasingly, this is the discourse of the state, calling upon Mexicans in television commercials to "make an extra effort" in order to pull the country of out the current crisis. At the height of the debt crisis, the leading Mexican daily, Excelsior, published an article emphasizing the family's role as the main pillar in the efforts to deal with the crisis (Benería, 1992:97). What is not recognized in this discourse is the unequal distribution of labour within the family and the gendered nature of "survival strategies."

3.2 AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CAMPESINA

The inability of PRONASOL to effectively address gender inequality in rural areas is indicative of the government's social policy record. Critics argue that government policy toward the countryside is not only biased against women, but that programs directed to women are ill-conceived (Aranda, 1993; Velázquez, 1992). Despite the wide spectrum of women's realities in the contemporary Mexican countryside, government programs directed at women show very little flexibility in recognizing this diversity
In government programs and rhetoric, the category 'campesina' (peasant woman) is used to refer to all women in rural localities, overlooking differences in terms of occupation, age, status, personal experience, interests, etc. Rural women are often still considered “reproducers” rather than agricultural producers on par with men (Deere and Léon, 1987). Women’s participation in agriculture and related activities has been underestimated in census figures and their productive work within the home has not been considered economic activity (Arizpe, 1989). Such erroneous data gathering and false conceptualizations of rural women are related to the male-bias in development, and the model chosen--U.S. agriculture (Elson, 1992; Escobar, 1995).

Government programs and policies are testimony that the state plays a role in perpetuating the social, economic, and ideological processes that subordinate women (Agarwal, 1988). Throughout the 20th century, the Mexican state has constructed an official representation of peasant women as subordinate to peasant men, both through policies targeting women and policies that have awarded them fewer rights. Since Mexico’s agrarian programs have largely centred on land redistribution rather than integral reform, this section explores the literature on women’s structural disadvantages in the countryside and land reform legislation. The final portion of this section discusses current neoliberal legislation.

3.2.1 Agrarian Reform

Despite rural women’s participation in the Mexican revolution and subsequent struggles that pushed forward agrarian reform, 20th-century state policies have exacerbated women’s subordination within the family by placing them at a structural disadvantage in terms of access to land and productive resources such as credit (Aranda, 1988, 1993; Deere, 1985; Robles et. al, 1993; Velázquez, 1992). Women did not achieve equal juridical standing to men as beneficiaries of agrarian reform until 1971, yet post-1971 allocations account for a small number of beneficiaries and were often of poor quality land. Furthermore, state policies that directly target women have been criticized severely.
for their failure to address the causes of women's subordination and their preference for 'assisting' women in the completion of their traditional roles (Velázquez, 1992)

Mexico's agrarian reform project did not directly benefit women. Land distribution began in 1915, but it was not until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) that significant expropriation and redistribution occurred. Early agrarian legislation made no reference to the gender of beneficiaries (Arizpe and Botey, 1987). The first agrarian law (January 6, 1915) made no specific reference to individual land rights, and in the land rights clauses of the 1917 constitution there was still no reference to gender. The Ley Ejidal (Ejido Law, 1930), which designated household heads as land reform beneficiaries, also made no mention of women. Designating the 'household head' as beneficiary, however, is problematic in Latin America. According to social custom throughout the region, if both an adult man and an adult woman reside in a household, the man is considered its head (Deere, 1985). It was not until changes to the law in 1927 that ejido members were established as “Mexican nationals, males over the age of 18, or single women or widows supporting a family” (Arizpe and Botey, 1987:70). Adult men could apply for land irrespective of their family position, whereas single women without dependents and married women were ineligible (Deere, 1985). The law also stipulated that if a female ejidataria married another ejido member, she was dispossessed of her land rights. While the clause was created to prevent land concentration within the ejido, it was biased against women (Deere, 1985). Thus throughout the 1920-1940s, when the bulk of land redistribution took place, rural women did not receive the direct benefits of land reform. The re-peasantization process, however, improved women's living conditions in general, along with those of their families and communities.

It was not until 1971 that Mexican agrarian law awarded women legal equality as beneficiaries of land reform. Women were also now allowed to hold administrative posts within the ejido. The agrarian reform process, however, was winding down. President Echeverría (1970-1976) revitalized the land redistribution process, yet post-1971
allocations for both men and women included accounted for approximately 10% of total beneficiaries, and these grants often consisted of marginal land (Gates, 1993).

Furthermore, legal equality for women did not mean equal access to land occurred *de facto*. Rural women’s direct access to land is precarious not so much in terms of their *de jure* position but because of patriarchal cultural conditioning and discrimination. Patrilocal patterns and patrilineal inheritance patterns are extensive in many (but not all) peasant communities in Mexico, a pattern which is not specific to any one ethnic group in particular (González, 1988). Peasant women in Mexico are most often residual inheritors of land; families with male sons prefer to leave them the bulk of the *solar* (open yards under cultivation, adjacent to dwellings), crop land, houses, farming implements, and any work animals they may have (D’Aubeterre, 1992; González, 1988). Young women inherit land when there are no eligible male inheritors (sons, grandchildren, nephews) within the domestic unit, or if they remain single. Some common arguments are that women don’t need property because they get married and use their husband’s land; that son-in-laws cannot be trusted with the family patrimony; and that women don’t work the land (Marroni, 1995). This is tied into the gender division of labour in the Mexican countryside, whereby: “to be able to drive oxen--or, in other words, greater physical force-guarantees men access to property, the status of producer, and better pay in cases of paid work” (Marroni, 1995:147, my translation). Another disadvantage for daughters in patrilocal communities is that they are not close to their parents and thus unable to “earn” inheritance by taking care of them (Marroni, 1995). But even in cases when young women do inherit land, the *ejido* and related matters are considered the domain of their husbands; women do not have *de facto* prerogatives in the exercise of property rights even when they have been formally assigned to them (Marroni, 1995). Although women may not derive the same benefits from owning land as men do, it can make a significant difference in the degree of economic dependency they have. Landless women do not have this alternative, and are often economically compelled to stay in abusive relationships.
Women have also had unequal access to the productive resources needed to farm. Obtaining the credit and technical assistance female producers are legally entitled to is one of the main problems confronting rural women (Velázquez, 1992). In some cases, a women’s male relatives use this as a pretext to take control of her allotted land (Arizpe and Botey, 1987). Women have been rarely included in technical training programs and agricultural production aid, despite the fact that they are often the principal producers of basic grains (Velázquez, 1992). During the 1970s, rural extension for women was limited to information campaigns on how to improve family nutrition or exercise “proper” hygiene (Velázquez, 1992). In general, “rural extension services reproduced the socially constructed--and idealized--gender division of labor in which men were the agriculturalists and women the housewives” (Deere and Léon, 1987:78).

Although demographics have transformed the gender composition of ejido membership and up to 50% of ejidatarios in some communities are women, the number of ejidatarias on a national scale remains significantly inferior to the number of ejidatarios. Arizpe and Botey (1987) note that women accounted for 15% of ejidatarias and members of agrarian communities in 1984. The majority of these women are ejidatarias by default--widows who inherited their husbands’ plots. They often rent or share-crop their land, and do not participate directly in productive processes, with control of the parcel in the hands of sons or brothers. Arizpe and Botey’s figure (15%), therefore, is not an accurate indicator of women’s access to property rights in the Mexican countryside (1987).

3.2.2 The Women’s Decade and the UAIM

Mexico’s agrarian reform project (1917-1992) can thus be seen as state-legislated inequality that exacerbated existing forms of gender subordination in the countryside. The incapacity of the Mexican state to correct inequalities in agrarian reform and agrarian policies, and thus to perpetuate gender subordination is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the history of the Unidad Agrícola Industrial para la Mujer (Agricultural-Industrial Unit for Women, UAIM). The piece of legislation which created the UAIM accompanied the
1971 law that awarded women legal equality as beneficiaries of land reform. The New Federal Agrarian Reform Law, in which the program was embodied, called for the allocation of one parcel of land to women who were not *ejidatarias*. The parcel would be used for collective agro-industrial activities defined as: “child care centres, centres of sewing and education, *nixtamal* mills, and in general, all those installations destined specifically to be at the service and protection of peasant women” (cited in Deere 1985: 1047). In 1979, the UAIMs became eligible for credit from the rural development bank to fund their projects. The intention, according to official documents and rhetoric, was the incorporation of women into the productive process. In line with the Women in Development (WID) discourse that began to emerge on an international scale in the early 1970s, the Mexican government sought to “invest in women” as a “cost-effective” route to broader development goals (Escobar, 1995). The central proposal of the creation of UAIMs was “to support the productive development of the agrarian nucleus by means of the economic participation of women” (Velázquez, 1992).

Turning the “development gaze” on rural women, official rhetoric created a generalized representation of rural women as illiterate, kitchen-bound housewives on the margins of production that needed to be “incorporated” into the nation’s economically active population (Villarreal, 1994). Government documentation concerning the UAIMs:

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\text{describes women as aspiring to obtain an income independently from their husbands and families. The program emphasizes that women should strengthen their economic roles and improve their status in such a way to constitute an active force in society (supposing, obviously, that they don’t already constitute one). Furthermore, the ‘world of production’ is presented as the world of progress, of development, of the free enterprise that provides the way out from poverty, and in which, obviously, is the dominion of ‘experts’, naturally outside of the rural scene (Villarreal, 1994:13, my translation).}
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*Nixtamal* refers to the mixture of corn softened in water and lime that is ground to make dough for tortillas. At night, women who make their own tortillas prepare the *nixtamal*. In the morning, they grind the *nixtamal*. Some women do this using their own mills at home; others must stand in line at public mills. Others must grind their *nixtamal* the traditional way, with their *metate* (a stone rolling pin and board).
The official incorporation of women did not necessarily have anything to do with the intention of benefiting women, but was politically necessary on a number of counts: to satisfy certain national and international audiences, to channel rising discontent in the countryside, and to co-opt large sectors of the population through State institutions (Villarreal, 1994).

The UAIMs were established throughout rural areas following legal procedures established by the national agrarian bureaucracy, and each group was supervised by a team of social workers, technical assistants, and bureaucrats. UAIMs became a vehicle of legitimation for the agrarian bureaucracy: “They took photographs of the women working in their enterprises to show visitors and superiors how government money was being used productively and how the work of the functionary that had the photo in his possession was close to the "people at the base" (Villarreal, 1994:10, my translation).

Contrary to ambitious government plans, a number of studies on the UAIMs cast their success into doubt. First of all, although over eight thousand UAIMs in the Mexican countryside have legal status, only 1,224 actually began operations and only 1,112 of these have received credit (Arizpe and Botey, 1987). Villarreal (1994) has estimated that only 20% of Mexican ejidos actually created UAIMs; Aranda (1993) is more conservative, citing that only 5% of ejidos have done so. In some ejidos men denied women their right to a collective parcel, most notably in land-poor communities (Arizpe and Botey, 1987).

The UAIMs in existence share a number of common difficulties. The few UAIMs involved in crop production face severe challenges because they are located on marginally productive, unwanted areas of the ejido (Aranda, 1993; Arizpe, 1989). The bulk of UAIMs, however, are productive projects—tortillas shops, poultry farms, and sewing workshops—that function as productive cooperatives in which remuneration is based on income derived from sales. Case studies reveal the projects are not commercially viable;

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1Currently, the UAIMs remain the only legally recognized route form in which peasant women can organize with legal recognition and right to credit (Aranda, 1993).
they are incapable of overcoming monopoly control of distribution/commercialization outlets; and their costs of production are higher than most businesses manufacturing similar goods (Arizpe and Botey, 1987). UAIMs suffer from lack of credit, untimely credit, and a general lack of productive resources; moreover, the procedures in procuring credit from BANRURAL have been long and complicated (Aranda, 1993). UAIMs have also had problems achieving autonomy within the ejido. The amount of state-spending on UAIMs has also been minimal (less than that spent on groups dominated by men) and thus prohibited the UAIM from going beyond charity and acting as a vehicle of economic development (Villarreal, 1994).

In general, the form of organization embodied by the UAIMs did not modify the condition of women in the countryside, other than to intensify their work through the creation of extra-domestic activities (production, commercialization, organization of work, negotiations for obtaining credit, etc.) (Zapata and López, 1993:71). As a result, they have had problems functioning because they do not take measures to lighten the domestic loads of their members who are, exclusively, women (Aranda, 1993). Once the initial enthusiasm has passed, UAIMs often turn into a constant source of conflicts over the burden of obligations. Secondly, since peasant women have different domestic loads, UAIM members are mostly young women without children, women whose children are no longer dependent minors, or childless women (Aranda, 1993). As soon as the young women marry and begin to have children, they tend to abandon the UAIM because their domestic workload increases.

As such, UAIMs have been criticized for perpetuating relations of gender subordination by consolidating power relations in respect to the state and other patriarchal structures and not touching the origins and effects of the social inequality in which women live (Aranda, 1993; Villarreal, 1994). Moreover, rights within the UAIM:

...are not the equivalent of having access to land in one's own name or the right to participate in the decisions of the ejido ... all too often these special
projects aimed at women fail to recognize woman’s role as agricultural producer and serve to reproduce the idealized sexual division of labour as housewives and mothers (Deere, 1985: 1047).

It is perhaps not coincidental that the UAIMs were created in the same year women received equal juridical standing next to men and the agrarian reform project was revitalized due to rising social tensions. Not only do they act as a mechanism to draw women’s energy away from land struggles to be channeled into small-scale income-generating projects, they serve to divide men and women on these issues.

Despite the many criticisms, the UAIMs have constituted the only government program specifically directed at women that has endured since its inception in 1971, notwithstanding erratic support. It was not until 1980--nine years later--that national state programs directed towards rural women emerged. That year, the Programa Nacional de Integración de la Mujer al Desarrollo (National Program of Women’s Integration into Development, PRONAM), was created within the Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council, CONAPO). The principal objective of this program was to create a National Plan for Women’s Integration into Development, a goal which was never executed due to the short-lived existence of PRONAM (Aranda, 1993). Later, during the de la Madrid administration (1982-1988), the government designed a program specifically for rural women: Programa de Acción para la Participación de la Mujer Campesina, en Consecución del Desarrollo Rural (Program of Action for the Participation of Peasant Women in the Attainment of Rural Development, PROMUDER). PROMUDER, again under the auspices of the government’s population control institute (CONAPO), came into the public eye in 1983 and was planned to go into effect in 1983. PROMUDER constituted the first state initiative to diagnose the situation of rural women in detail (see Aranda, 1993:193). The program, however, was “not directed to reversing or countering unequal gender relations nor the causes of the crisis in the countryside, in spite of identifying its effects on the situation of rural women” (Robles et al., 1993:30, my translation). In any event, PROMUDER was never assigned resources.
The only program under PROMUDER that was actually carried out was the UAIM. Financial support came from the Programa de Desarrollo Comunitario con la Participación de la Mujer (Program of Community Development with Women's Participation, PINMUDE), also formed in 1984. PINMUDE did not directly target rural women but women from "marginalized communities" in general. Unlike PROMUDER, PINMUDE did not include a diagnostic of rural women nor the specific effects the crisis and economic restructuring were having on women. More insidiously, it implied that women were responsible for resolving their economic difficulties through self-employment and better administration of income (Robles et al., 1993).

The public policies directed at rural women throughout the 1980s were not directed at a real transformation of gender inequalities. They remained concentrated in the UAIM, and were principally used for political ends: the assigning of resources to those working for the Central Nacional Campesino (National Peasant Federation, CNC), a pro-ruling party organization; in pre-election campaign promises (especially on the municipal level); to generate internal conflicts within communities; and to coopt and more closely link women, paternalistically, to the state (Aranda, 1993; Robles et al., 1993; Villarreal, 1994). In sum, the policies directed at rural women have largely been ineffectual in improving their situations. They are limited in scope, suffer from corruption in their execution, and lack funding. Moreover, they have been applied totally isolated from the entirety of economic and social policies directed at the Mexican countryside. As such, "it cannot be imagined that programs directed at women can, in themselves, resolve all the structural, economic, social, and ideological causes that generated the marginality of rural women" (Velázquez, 1992:258, my translation).

3.2.3 Exacerbating Structured Inequality: Recent Ejido Reform Legislation

The most recent incident that testifies to the statement by Velázquez (1992) above are the changes executed during the Salinas administration to constitutional Article 27, the agrarian reform law. In terms of gender, these reforms constitute the most harmful form
of state-legislated inequality in Mexican agrarian history. The reforms have the potential to restrict peasant women’s scarce access to land even further and place them in a more precarious juridical position in respect to land in their families’ name. The main thrust of the reforms legalize and encourage productive associations between private capital and *ejidatarios*, terminate state-sponsored land distribution, and create a land market in formerly inalienable properties. While the implications of productive associations can only be determined by future field research, the second two points mentioned above have immediate gender implications. Firstly, no more land will be distributed, and thus the state has washed its hands of correcting current existing inequalities. The hopes of the landless and land-poor of owning a few hectares are terminated under the new Article 27. Secondly, the legislation converts the *ejido* from a family patrimony into an individualized title for the (male) household head, and creates the conditions for its possible sale without women’s consent. The former legislation assumes that the *ejido* plot is for the entire family’s subsistence and regards the family head as representative of the household. In contrast, the new law regards the head as an individual property holder detached from family obligations.

Shortly after the law was announced (November 1991) and passed by Congress (February 1992), social scientists, female politicians, rural *promotoras*, and rural women’s organizations began to examine the implications of the law in terms of gender. The amount of research dedicated to this area has been minimal; a few documents have been produced and field research on the immediate impacts of the law is only beginning to emerge. One of the most comprehensive documents that examines the law came out of the 1992 *Encuentro Nacional de Promotoras Rurales* (National Meeting of Rural Field workers). The document examines the articles of the law 1) that fail to recognize women, 2) that strengthen rural women as productive actors, 3) that do not strengthen women as productive actors, and 4) that women can exercise to their benefit (CAMPO, 1992). The
document assumes (correctly) that the majority of ejidatarios are male and women's lack of equal de jure and de facto standing in terms of land ownership (CAMPO, 1992).

Articles that fail to take women into account

Articles 17, 20, 23, and 80 of the reformed constitutional Article 27 have been pinpointed as failing to take women in account. Article 17 names the ejidatario as having the right to designate who will inherit his/her ejido rights, which include land and other rights. As such, the ejidatario should create a list of inheritors, in order of preference, who will inherit the ejido rights on the ejidatario's death. This list should be deposited in the National Agrarian Register, and can be subject to modifications by the same ejidatario. Article 17 does not obligate the ejidatario to designate his wife or concubine as his successors, nor his own children. The successor can be anyone of his choosing.

Article 20 claims that the ejidatario loses his/her rights in the following situations: 1) through legal cession of the parcel and communal rights; 2) through renouncing his/her rights, by which they would be ceded in the community’s favor; and 3) when another person acquires the ejidatario's rights legally according to Article 48 of the law. This article does not take into account the ejidatario's wife or female partner in the cession of ejido rights. It gives the ejidatario the right to make decisions over goods the couple may hold in common, and does not specify the woman's rights.

Article 23 refers to the Ejido's General Assembly, requiring each ejido to meet at least once every six months. It lists the issues that fall within the assembly's jurisdiction, which include altering internal law, denying membership, electing leadership, designating internal funds, distributing possible profits generated by ejido activities, signaling and delimiting the urban settlement and the commons, and terminating ejido rule when requested by the Procuraduría Agraria (Agrarian Attorney General's office, PA). Although issues of key importance to the ejido are decided in the General Assembly, such as its legal existence under the new law (participating in Procede land titling;
privatization), the law does not provide for the inclusion of members of the *ejido* community (such as spouses) other than title holders.

Article 80 allows *ejidatarios* to pass their parcel rights to other *ejidatarios* or neighbours of the same community. Two witnesses are required, and the National Agrarian Register must be notified. The *Ejido* Commissariat is required to make a record of the transaction. The spouse and children of the person disposing of their rights, respectively, have the right to be the first buyers (*derecho del tanto*), which must be exercised in 30 days following the announcement of sale, after which this right will be annulled. This article allows the *ejidatarios* the right to sell the parcel without the consent of his wife/female or his children. Although they have priority to be the first buyers, they have only 30 days to exercise their right.

*Articles that work in women's favour*

Some provisions were made in the reformed law to work specifically in women's favor. These include Article 63 and 64. Article 63 lists those areas of the *ejido* designated as part of the urban settlement, areas considered "necessary for the development of the community life of the *ejido*". The UAIM has been included in the list. Article 64 exempts these areas in the urban settlement from privatization. They are inalienable and they cannot be seized. Federal, state, municipal authorities, especially the Agrarian Attorney General's office, are charged with making sure these laws are abided by.

*Articles that do not strengthen women as productive subjects*

Article 71 has been highlighted as not strengthening women as productive subjects. Article 71 grants the *Ejido* Assembly the possibility of preserving an area (preferably located in the best lands bordering the urban zone) to be used by women over 16 years of age for a farming enterprise or a rural industry. This farming/industrial unit should have infrastructure designed for the service and protection of rural women. Rural *promotoras* criticize this article because it allows for the creation of 'Rural Production Societies' that are distinct from UAIFMs. Considering the small number of *ejidos* that actually created a
UAIM and the number that are currently still active, it is questionable if this law will ever be applied, however well-intended its motives.

Article 108 states that groups of *ejidos* can create unions, with the objective of coordinating production, mutual aid, or marketing. In order to create a union of *ejidos*, the *Ejido* Assemblies of each community must pass a resolution. The *ejido* unions can establish specialized enterprises for mutual benefit (e.g. to exploit shared natural resources). *Ejidatarios*, organized peasant women, children of *ejidatarios*, neighbours, and small producers are allowed to participate. This article discriminates against women since they can only establish a productive enterprise if they are ‘organized’. *Ejidatarios*, their children, neighbours, or small producers, however, can establish enterprises without this restriction.

*Articles that women can exercise to their benefit*

Articles 18, 48, and 85 have been listed by rural *promotoras* as parts of the law women can exercise in their benefit. Article 18 specifies that when the *ejidatario* has not designated successors, or when one of the listed successor cannot be an inheritor for some legal or material reason, agrarian rights are transmitted in the following order of preference: 1) to the spouse; 2) to the concubine; 3) to one of the *ejidatario*’s children; 4) to one of the *ejidatario*’s descendants; and 5) to other economic dependents. Women thus have priority in the transmission of rights when the *ejidatario* has not named successors or the designated successors cannot assume their inheritance.

Article 48 states that non-*ejidatarios* utilizing abandoned *ejido* lands (not part of human settlements, forests, or jungles) in a continuous, public, and peaceful manner for a period of five years (in good faith) or ten years (in bad faith), can acquire the same rights over the parcel as any *ejidatario*. This means that when *ejidatarios* emigrate and are away from their parcel for more than five years, their wives/female partners can claim the right to be the land title holders.
Article 84, which refers to an ejidatario’s disposal of rights (not because of sale), claims that the ejidatario’s family, people who have worked the parcels for more than a year, other ejidatarios, neighbours, and the ejido’s population nucleus—in that order—will enjoy the right to be the first buyers, which they must exercise in 30 days, after which their right will be annulled. Women—considered as family or for having worked the parcel for more than a year—thus enjoy the right to be the first buyers of the land in the case of the dispossession of parcel.

Other Considerations

A number of criticisms exist outside the particular articles of the law. For example, rural promotoras argue that the current situation of the UAIMs is not dealt with sufficiently (CAMPO, 1992). On another note, the law makes no reference to landless agricultural day labourers, of which a high proportion are women (CAMPO, 1992). Researchers have also pointed out that changes to the agrarian law ignore spousal rights protected under civil law (Taller Universitario de Asesoría a Campesinos, n.d.). Granting ejidatarios the right to designate who will inherit the family parcel negates the rights of the spouse to administrate 50% of the family goods. It also brings into question whether women’s rights under civil law will be respected in the Agrarian Tribunals when determining cases of disagreement over the inheritance of the parcel.

It cannot be denied that the modifications to the agrarian law favour women in certain respects. These certain cases are meaningless, however, when the complete reform package creates unequal circumstances for women next to men. Perhaps the most common and most significant criticism is that by privatizing the ejido it is transformed from a family patrimony into an individualized property title for the family head, which in Mexico is often institutionally and culturally defined as male. In reality, the reforms are making legal a de facto situation. The extent to which ejido patrimony belonged to the entire family in the majority of Mexican ejidos has been questioned (González, 1988) and is brought to the fore with the new government changes that disregard other family
members' rights. While exploitation of the *ejido* parcel may be collective, the title to the patrimony is never really shared: "the 'family patrimony' in reality is not as it seems: individuals are the ones that hold title and effective control" (González, 1988:69). The revised Article goes a step further, converting the individualized *de facto* land-holding title into a legal reality, allowing the owner the possibility of disposing of it at will. Women's situation has thus become that more precarious. It will also be important to monitor if upcoming government programs are executed within the revised framework, and if this marginalizes women as producers. PROCAMPO cheques, for example, are distributed using PROCEDE's "regularized" list of property holders, or household heads, rather than being designated for all who are working the parcel under cultivation.

3.3 Reorganizing Regional Economies: Peasant Economy in Crisis, Capitalist Agriculture in Expansion

One of the most visible signs that the peasant sector was in crisis in the 1960s was the increasing proletarianization in the countryside. Furthermore, the peasant economy had been monetized, and rural families had to purchase labour, services, and goods that were formerly obtained through reciprocal exchange, as well as the new 'necessities' of the 'revolution of aspirations' which accompanied Mexico's industrial development (Arizpe, 1989; D'Aubeterre, 1992; Young, 1978). Families began to diversify their economic activity, putting into practice new strategies for survival. These strategies were undoubtedly inscribed by gender and age within the peasant household, and differ greatly according to regional circumstances.

There is now a sizable body of literature demonstrating there has been a constant expansion of women's remunerated work concomitant with the crisis of the peasant economy that emerged in the 1960s (see González, 1994). This is intimately tied not only to the deterioration of agricultural production and men's off-farm earnings but also to the recent creation of a labour market of female posts, more precarious and lesser paid, in the national economy: 1) in agro-industry and medium-sized commercial agriculture
(horticulture, floriculture, and fruit production); 2) the industrial parks established in rural settings; and 3) the maquiladoras (Barrón, 1994; González, 1994; Lara, 1991; Marroni, 1994, 1995). While both rural men and women have been compelled to find paid work, women’s incorporation in remunerated labour is occurring at unprecedented rates: the number of women leaving rural areas for the cities or other agricultural zones surpasses that of men by 10% (Robles et al., 1993). On the other hand, women who have remained to cultivate the land or engage in craft activities in zones of high emigration have increased their subsistence sector activities (Arizpe, 1989; González, 1988). To begin this discussion, this section will explore the first and most common form of women’s proletarianization: their incorporation in domestic work.

3.3.1 Exodus of the Daughters

Female emigration began to emerge in the 1950s, when young peasant women were sent to the cities to work in the informal and service sectors as a result of falling incomes in rural communities throughout Mexico. Arizpe (1989) marks this phenomenon as the first signal of the peasant economy in crisis. The rural exodus to urban areas in many Latin American countries, especially in Mexico, has been preponderantly female (Aranda, 1993; Arizpe, 1989; Arizpe and Botev, 1987). This tendency is partly owing to women’s role in agriculture as the ‘wife’ of the producer, women’s lack of access to land, and patrilineal inheritance patterns (Arizpe, 1985). Furthermore, in some areas of Mexico, greater local job opportunities have existed for men (Young, 1978). Equally important has been the growth of the middle and upper classes that created urban employment opportunities in domestic service (Arizpe, 1989; González, 1994; Velázquez, 1992; Young, 1978). Despite the economic crisis of the 1980s, one in ten ‘economically active’

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8 Whether referring to women who leave their home communities to work in the cities as domestics, to those who become itinerant urban vendors, to those who migrate to zones of commercial agriculture, or to those in search for work on the northern borders, inter-state migrants continue to be, in their majority, women. Statistics reveal that women migrants within Mexico supersede men by 10%; Arizpe (1986) calculates that the proportion of women in country-city migration currents is 85 men for every 103 women (Velázquez, 1992). Furthermore, 15% of migrants to North America are women (Massey et al., 1990).
women was employed in domestic service according to Mexico’s 1990 census (González, 1994).

In Mexico’s most marginalized rural zones, where employment alternatives are limited, emigration to the cities has become a life stage for young women before they marry (D’Aubeterre, 1992; González, 1988). Once they are married, they return to their husband’s town of origin to take up the role of daughter-in-law. Rather than representing an escape from the subordination young women are subject to in their home communities and within their households, domestic work socializes women in the values of abnegation and self-sacrifice (D’Aubeterre, 1992). Studies have shown that rural women employed as domestics maintain close ties with their families, demonstrate a strong sense of owing and responsibility, and hand over the greater portion of their earnings to their mothers (Arizpe, 1989; D’Aubeterre, 1992; González, 1994). These remittances have played an important role in maintaining peasant households, to cover the day-to-day family expenses (as occurs amongst the poorest households); to buy productive inputs or pay land rents; or to contribute to sibling’s education (González, 1994). In the countryside, young domestics’ wages became:

... indispensable resources for the continuation of agricultural production. In this way migrant women that worked in the cities began to subsidize a peasant economy increasingly weaker due to price structure of agricultural and industrial products (Velázquez, 1992: 256, my translation).

As young women leave to work, other women in their household are forced to take up the tasks they formerly carried out. Beginning in the 1950s, then, peasant women’s work constituted a vital contribution for the process of industrialization, not only in the production of cheap agricultural food and farm products for the cities but also the “production” of migrant labour—equally as cheap—that formed the urban worker base (Velázquez, 1992).
3.3.2 The Feminization of Subsistence Farming: Male Absences and Women's Work

Women's principal role in the (re)production of migrant labour has not only supplied young domestic labour, but also the millions of rural Mexican workers in international and domestic urban centres and zones of commercial agriculture. Since the initiation of the Bracero Program in the 1940s which allowed Mexican males to emigrate to fulfill the needs of the American agricultural labor market, remittance income has increasingly contributed to the survival of peasant domestic units and the maintenance of subsistence agriculture. During the Bracero years (1945-1964), and after the termination of the program, male migration from rural areas in many regions was often cyclical, conforming to the growing cycle of subsistence crops (Arizpe, 1989; D'Aubeterre, 1992). Demographic growth and the deepening of the national and agricultural crisis in the late 1970s, however, set off a new wave of migration in many regions, with an extremely diversified group of workers involved in both formal and informal sources of labour throughout the United States for longer time periods (Nolasco 1991, cited in D'Aubeterre, 1995):

Migration of some family members provided a survival strategy for core peasant families because it allowed them to subsist in the countryside as living conditions continued to worsen. At first, the strategy served to complement household farm and handicraft income, and daughters were the main members to migrate. By the beginning of the 1960s, however, migration became a *sine qua non* for rural social reproduction, and sons also began to migrate but most frequently to other rural areas where agricultural work was available or to the United States. A pattern of relay migration was thus established (Arizpe and Botey, 1987:78).

Currently, migrants are forced to lengthen their periods in the north as the costs of frequent crossings rise, due to increased border vigilance and racist anti-immigrant policies in the United States.
This type of migration plays an extremely important role for the Mexican state. Migrant remittances have transformed the rural landscape, providing the necessary funds to improve personal dwellings (roofing houses; installing toilets); to bring much-needed services (potable water, paved roads); or to compensate for a profound lack of credit for agricultural production—areas the state has neglected. This is especially true for those communities cultivating subsistence crops on rain-fed land in the central and southern states. Dollar remittances are even more significant with the latest currency devaluation. Clearly, migration has alleviated social tensions in the countryside, allowing the state to avoid confronting marked social inequalities and the acute poverty of the rural sector.

The absence of these workers (predominantly males) from their home communities has placed the burden of agricultural production on the backs of women and their children, who undertake these responsibilities in addition to their usual productive and reproductive work. A growing body of literature now refers to the trend whereby women intensify their participation in productive activities as men become full- or part-time workers (most marked in basic grains producing regions) as the 'feminization' of subsistence agriculture (Aranda, 1988; Arizpe, 1989; Robles et al., 1993). Corn production becomes an important safety net to women facing the uncertainty of cash remittances. Considering that corn provides a third of the proteins and 40% of the caloric intake of rural Mexicans, and that in many communities the market is monopolized by buyers who deplete local supplies, the production of corn frees up income to be used for other purchases (Velázquez, 1992). Researchers have noted that women whose husbands migrate often

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9Migrant remittances play a central role in the country’s economy. In 1992, remittances from sent from Mexican migrants residing in the United States reached four billion dollars, a figure higher than that generated by tourism (Aragonés, 1993:10).

10In 1985, Astorga calculated that in the Mixteca indigenous zone in Oaxaca, migrants in the U.S. and other areas within Mexico sent more remittances to their families than the profits generated by the 80 thousand producers in the zone and more than BANRURAL’s total productive investments in the region (1985b).

11The ‘feminization’ of subsistence agriculture refers to an intensification of women’s work, so as not to imply women only became producers when faced with migration. Most rural women have always been producers; not only in the crops they plant in their solares, but in their participation in the household’s principal crops (see Marroni, 1993 for a discussion on the ‘feminization’ of agriculture).
carry out the entire set of agricultural tasks (Arizpe, 1989). In those communities where cultural restrictions strictly reserve certain agricultural tasks for men (e.g. plowing with work animals) women either use cash remittances to hire a field hand or carry out these activities at night when they cannot be seen (Arizpe, 1989; D’Aubeterre, 1995).

Increased participation of women in subsistence agriculture at the level of the domestic unit has represented an important familial survival strategy. Women have taken on this increased role, however, from a disadvantaged position in terms of access to credit, technical assistance, and decision-making in the ejido or agrarian community (Arizpe, 1989). Furthermore, the broadening of women’s activities when their husbands and children migrate surpasses food production. In zones of heavy male out-migration:

women assume tasks on the community level, make decisions, assume responsibilities of the ejido, attend meetings, go to commissions, take charge of production and services. The family unit remains in their hands, they are in charge of the parcel and for looking after the animals (Zapata and López, 1993:83, my translation).

Several studies have documented the wide gamut of activities in which rural women have incorporated themselves (Arizpe, 1989; D’Aubeterre, 1992, 1995; Velázquez, 1993). Such an intensification of women’s work, however, has come at a high physical cost (Robles et al., 1993). This is most severe in subsistence-based communities that lack basic services (piped water, local markets, roads) as women have compensated for absence of the migrant(s) on top of an already onerous domestic burden. Robles et al. (1993) note that “this double load--production in the [family] parcel and the responsibility in reproductive labors--has implied that peasant women work on average more than ten hours a day in comparison with the five to six that men work, with the consequent physical and nutritional wear and tear” (1993:27, my translation). Promotoras in indigenous communities estimate that indigenous women work anywhere from 16 to 19 hour days (Foro de la Realidad Indígena, Puebla, 1996).
Adult women--mothers--rarely migrate because their gendered reproductive/productive roles are critical for the survival of the family (Arizpe, 1988). The decision as to who will migrate and who will work the parcel is ultimately based in a gender role hierarchy:

Underlying migration strategies are not only structural factors [...] but the effects of a basically patriarchal family morality that inscribes decision-making: who migrates or who can migrate, who can wait for s/he who migrates, who should substitute the work of the absent one, what obligations those who belong to the home should take up, etc. (D'Aubeterre, 1992:17, my translation).

As such, migration to international destinations has been considered a predominantly male survival strategy. Not only is it an activity exercised mostly by men; to a large extent men have established international migration networks and control them. Furthermore, migration is a survival strategy in which women are residual beneficiaries: women do not have the same means to exercise this strategy nor do they have control over the benefits deriving from migration. It is not the point of this thesis to measure who suffers more from migration. For the migrant, searching for work in the United States often involves not only risking one’s life when crossing the border, but tolerating unsatisfactory living conditions, racist abuses, and employer exploitation in the migrant’s new community. For the family that stays behind, however, in the worst scenario “migration, in a growing number of cases, appears to be a polite word for desertion. It is a male survival strategy rather than a female survival strategy” (Elson, 1992:41).

When women take on direct agricultural production-- “men’s work” --as men migrate on a temporal, or sometimes permanent basis, however, the terrain of gender roles begins to shift. Women who remain in migrant communities are often virtually sustaining the community single-handedly in terms of economic, social, and cultural reproduction (Aranda, 1993; Arizpe, 1989; D’Aubeterre, 1992, 1995; Wilson, 1985). Economic change--poverty--can thus break the cultural norms sustaining a gender hierarchy (Nash,
Women's entrance into new spheres can raise their self-esteem and increase their participation in areas of decision-making previously closed to them, such as *ejido* assemblies. Whether such changes are "liberating" is debatable; women's double work load due to migration, for example, intensifies their exploitation: "while gender oppression may be lighter, class oppression is at its most extreme; and it is difficult to conclude that the apparent breakdown of rigidities in the gender hierarchy adds up to a step forward for women's emancipation" (Wilson, 1985:1023). As D'Aubeterre (1991) points out, the informal power women achieve from exercising their new responsibilities is not entirely substantive. She argues that the social identity of these women continues to be defined in a fundamental manner by the prescriptions of a patriarchal culture. The transformations in women's gender roles are still fundamentally mediated by the blood and kinship relations of men (husbands, sons, fathers) and by the specific relationships that these establish in the public world: with the market, the church, with other men, and in the state in general. It is possible, then, to speak of new roles and status *conferred* but not *achieved* in an autonomous manner by these women (D'Aubeterre, 1991). While researchers point to the new spaces for women created by male migration, "one cannot lose sight that simultaneous to this process, the spectrum of new roles and social spaces has been opened considerably more for the male migrants" (D'Aubeterre, 1992:13, my translation).

High rates of male out-migration can be seen as a direct result of increased reliance on women's labour by capital as facilitated by the state. As women and children take up work formerly done by their husbands and fathers, the state is not only exempt from exercising social responsibility towards the countryside, but capital is provided with a cheap labour force, whether that capital be working within Mexico or within the United States. The gender division of labour within the household, characterized by female production of foodstuffs and male semi-proletarianization, allows the payment by capital of a wage rate insufficient for familial maintenance and reproduction (Wilson, 1985).
Migration represents a loss of resources whose costs have been borne by the peasant sector as a class; a burden which has fallen to a greater extent on peasant women by virtue of their gender (Arizpe, 1988).

Current policies appear to aggravate migration and the feminization of subsistence agriculture. Under current economic restructuring, the modernization program for subsistence producers stands as a harsh transition. As shown in Chapter One, corn producers have seen rural credit sources dry up, input prices skyrocket, and support prices plummet (Otero et al., 1994). Welfare programs (PROCAMPO and PRONASOL) have been put in place, but such paltry amounts cannot transform the production process nor cushion the blows felt by the restructuring of this sector and the economy in general via labor and commodity market links. The new changes to the agrarian reform law which allow for the sale of ejido parcels may have serious effects on rural out-migration, resulting in the exodus of many workers on the margins of survival (Cornelius, 1992). Simply put, small-scale producers of basic grains are not considered as an efficient branch of the farming sector worthy of strategic investment under current government policy, but as a social problem to be managed and if possible, phased out. Moreover, the economic crisis affecting the entire population that has extinguished urban sources of employment and created massive inflation has generalized migration strategies across social sectors.

### 3.3.3 The Rise of Commercial Agriculture and the 'Feminization' of Day Labour

The crisis of the peasant economy and the country's progressive loss of food self-sufficiency coincided with the growth of capitalist agriculture, important changes in the crops cultivated on Mexican soil, and the transnationalization of Mexican agriculture. Unlike basic grains, encouraging the production of commercial crops for export has figured prominently in government strategies to improve the agricultural sector (see Barrón, 1994, 1995). The production of fruits, vegetables, and flowers for export is considered to be Mexico's 'comparative advantage' that will insert the country into the global marketplace.
Since the 1970s, production (primarily for export) of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, has risen considerably (Barrón, 1991, 1994; Lara, 1991, in press; Lara and Becerril, in press; Marroni, 1993). The agricultural sector has experienced a rise in traditional exports and the diversification of others, favoured by rising consumption in both domestic and international markets in the last few decades (Barrón, 1995; Marroni, 1993). Floriculture boomed in Mexico in the 1980s, rising from 205 hectares of greenhouses at the beginning of that decade to more than four hundred hectares in 1995 (Lara, in press). Currently, 95% of this production is destined for export, principally to the United States (Lara, in press). The area under cultivation devoted to fruits and vegetables for export rose from 276,800 hectares in 1970 to seven thousand hectares by 1990, representing 3.5% of the total land cultivated (Barrón, 1994). Although this percentage appears relatively small, Barrón (1994) notes that the absorption of labour in fruits and vegetable production is much higher than for other crops, absorbing almost one-quarter of the economically active rural population. In floriculture, it is calculated that the greenhouses currently under cultivation have granted year-round work to more than seven thousand people (Lara, 1995, Lara and Becerril, in press).

There is now a substantial body of literature which demonstrates that the expansion in the cultivation and processing of labour-intensive export crops--predominantly fruits, vegetables, and flowers--opened up a labour market for women (Barrón, 1994; Lara Flores, 1991, 1995; Marroni, 1993, 1994, 1995). Women’s incorporation in this sector has occurred at an accelerated pace since the 1970s. Using population censuses for 1970 and 1980, Barrón (1990 and 1993) demonstrated that while men’s participation as agricultural

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12Barrón argues that the most important reason behind this expansion was an increase in demand in the US. She cites the example of tomato exports to the US which in 1970 amounted to 158,200 tons; by 1989 this figure had reached 415,600 tons. Other vegetables have also noted an increase, such as green chilies, peas, asparagus, cabbage, onions, and so on, which grew from 169,500 tons to 700,000 tons in the same period (1995:139). In fruits and vegetables, Mexican exports rose in 1970 from US$ 14.3 million to US$ 166 million in 1980 and in 1990 reached US$ 460.6 million dollars (Lara, in press).

13While in 1982 horticulture had created 350 thousand jobs, by 1990 it had employed a total of 1.2 million workers, of which 950 thousand were located in direct field and packaging activities, and 250 thousand in indirect activities such as transport and commercialization (Lara, 1995).
day labourers for the length of the decade increased by 100 000 workers (0.25%). The number of women workers grew from 266 650 to 742 710 (10.8%). This figures are even greater when the deficiencies in these censuses are recognized. Estimates of the number of female agricultural workers in Mexico in 1985 varied between 1.5 and 2 million (Arizpe, 1989; Astorga, 1985b).

Women’s participation in remunerated agricultural work has been concentrated in select branches of production. Women constituted approximately 15% of the agricultural labour force in 1990; however, in fruits and vegetables production this percentage was 50% (Barrón, 1994). There is not only an important female participation in the harvesting of these products--women represent approximately 90% of the labour force contracted in selection, packaging, and presentation (Barrón, 1992; Lara, 1994; Suárez, 1993). In floriculture, 70-80% of the work force is female, a percentage that rises within the greenhouses (Lara, in press; Lara and Becerril, in press). In the food packaging and processing sector, women make up to 75% of the work force in the agro-maquilas. Transnational companies control export production by means of sub-contracting, or the “agro-maquila”. This modality permits taking advantage of the comparative advantages of the country and lower costs, decentralizing certain parts of the work process (Lara, in press). The term agro-maquila was coined owing to the expansion of foreign companies in this sector (Robles et al., 1993).

Considering the rising participation of women in the production of flowers, fruits, and vegetables, and their disproportionate numbers in packaging and selection processes, we can speak of a “feminization” of these labour markets. A number of factors have been highlighted to help explain this trend: the rural proletarianization of both sexes and the disintegration of peasant parcels; male migration, above all international; and the previous experiences and abilities developed for women in agricultural work, that makes them especially adequate for the requirements of the labour processes (Marroni, 1993). This “feminization” process is not simply the result of a greater sale of labour power on the part
of the peasantry nor a greater demand for labour power; the transformation of Mexican agriculture has created a pool of cheap, female positions (Lara, in press; Marroni, 1993). The feminization of agriculture is not only a marked phenomenon in Latin America—it is now an undeniable global trend (Lara, in press; Marroni, 1993).

Before entering this discussion, it must be recognized that the labour market feeding production of flowers, fruits and vegetable is not homogenous. In very general terms, Barrón (1991, 1995) has distinguished between secondary (less developed) and primary (more developed) sectors. The former are producing for the national market and are dominated by small landowners. The primary sector, on the other hand, consist of large capitalists producing mainly for export, with sub-standard products sold on the national market. They deal with great volumes of merchandise, have different picking and packaging techniques, and observe rigorous quality norms in product presentation. The productive process is complicated and there are a variety of different jobs and tasks. Secondary labour markets offer a fewer number of jobs and tasks, and lower quality and product presentation requirements. The difference between primary and secondary markets also finds expression in the gender division of labour operating within them; in primary markets there is a rigid gender division of labour; in secondary markets this is only just beginning to take place. Regionality also plays an important role in determining the labour force. Female migrants from states with higher degrees of poverty make up much of the labour force in the commercial agriculture zones of north-western Mexico, whereas the labour markets feeding commercial agriculture in the south-central states are often local (Robles et al., 1993; Velázquez, 1992).14

The labour process in export agricultural production specializes, segments, and disqualifies the work force, ascribing tasks differentially according to gender, age, and

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14 According to Robles et al. (1993), capitalist production of fruits and vegetables in the northwest relies on over 100 thousand waged workers principally from the southern states of Guerrero and Oaxaca; 60% of the labour forces serving these enterprises in Baja California and Sinaloa were women and children, many of them Mixtecs, Triquis, and Zapotes.
ethnicity. The most marked phenomenon is the creation of female posts that are antagonistically ranked lower than those occupied by men in the same enterprise (Lara and Becerril, in press; Marroni, 1993). As this section demonstrates, this is occurring in the agricultural sector’s most dynamic branches (e.g. agro-industry, floriculture) and not only in the traditional branches where low productivity is used to legitimate such an argument (Marroni, 1993). One can speak of “parallel” markets within the sector since men and women do not work in the same branches of production, they do not occupy the same posts, and they do not have the same forms of employment nor remuneration (Lara and Becerril, in press). Women are employed in selection, packaging, and presentation of the product, while men are employed as security guards, maintenance workers or higher-ranking field hands. These few positions serve to contrast and devalue the work women do, which often constitutes the crux of the ranches’ operations. This depreciation of the jobs assigned to women not only justifies a depreciated wage, it hides the fact that tasks involved in the production of fruits, vegetables, and flowers are physically demanding and require a variety of skills and concentration. Like the maquiladoras on the northern border, these enterprises justify hiring women by providing a litany of supposed “feminine” traits suited to the production process (conscientiousness, concentration, dexterity). In some regions, such as the Atlixco Valley in Puebla, the feminization of waged agricultural work supports an ideology that grants agricultural activity a lesser status and encourages men to abandon it (Marroni, 1995).

Since the 1970s, researchers have argued that the incorporation of women into agricultural wage labour occurs in low paying, unstable labour markets (Arizpe, 1989; Arizpe and Aranda, 1981; Velázquez, 1992). In many branches of export production, such as floriculture and vegetables, this is no longer true (Barrón, 1994; Lara and Becerril, in press). Rural women have entered high-productivity labour markets that pay better wages with year-round employment. Yet these wages—sometimes twice the minimum wage—are still lower than those received in domestic work, and on average, suffered a 39%
devaluation in real terms during the 1982-1987 period (Velázquez, 1992). In addition, labour costs are still far below the international average, especially relative to the United States, thus giving the Mexican producer a comparative advantage (Barrón, 1994). For men, it is undesirable work (Marroni, 1993).

In order to achieve ‘flexibility’ in the productive process and meet the demands of the world market, the most dynamic branches of agro-export production have initiated a productive reconversion of the sector (Lara, in press). This has involved introducing new forms of organization that demand more involvement and qualification on the part of workers. Workers must be able to intensify the work pace, execute numerous distinct tasks, ensure product quality, and guarantee ‘just in time’ market delivery (Lara, in press). Lara (in press) has noted that in the floriculture ranches and consortia, the predominantly female staff is well educated. While employers in this sector claim young women tolerate the intensity of the work pace and more easily accept organizational changes by virtue of their gender, Lara (in press) argues that young women constitute the best option because they constitute a well educated staff which serves as a base to achieve their training in the enterprises:

This preference for young women has nothing to do with the supposedly “feminine” qualities for handling flowers or vegetables. It involves a mechanism that allows making female labour a comparative advantage. Firstly, because it takes advantage of an unrecognized [...] ‘tacit’ qualifications previously obtained by women in domestic work. Secondly, because there are few employment opportunities for women in the rural environment, even though they have a high level of schooling [...] Thirdly, because they are made responsible for the quality of the products and that they arrive to the market at a precise moment, intensifying productivity at the cost of their physical expenditure (22, my translation).

Many of these women have no previous job experience, which also comes as a benefit to employers seeking ‘docile’ labour.

Rural women’s entrance into these labour markets often holds unfavorable consequences for them. On one hand, some women find a new socialization space,
complete with new areas of reference and identification as well as a measure of economic independence. On the whole, however, the feminization of agricultural labour markets was accompanied by a marked deterioration in women’s living and working conditions: “to speak of the feminization of agriculture you can also speak of the feminization of rural poverty and inequality in society” (Barrón, 1994; Marroni, 1993:57; Velázquez, 1992). Furthermore, women day labourers have not experienced a corresponding decrease in their household workload. For women with children, the reproductive burden is even greater. While the greater part of female day labourers in the early 1970s were young single women or women who had finished their reproductive cycle, an increasing number of married women, household heads, and single women with children have been entering the agricultural labour market since the 1980s (González and Salles, 1995). For those women working in the fields, workers often bring their children to the work site (Barrón, 1993). Barrón (1991) has noted that a high number of women working in packaging are household heads. While this position has the most intense work pace and the work hours double during peak production, it is often the best paid.

The working conditions in agro-export production have great physical costs and imply risk. Recent case studies have revealed that day labourers, even when employed for the greater part of the year, are hired without any of the benefits stipulated by labour law (Barrón, 1995; Lara and Becerril, in press). They are not paid for overtime (although they often work a seven-day week) nor for holidays. They are not covered by the national health scheme (Barrón, 1994). There is little room for advancement and seniority is not recognized. There are no old-age pensions. Although accidents at work are frequent, the workers do not receive indemnity, and in the case of death, neither does the victim’s family, although this is a legal requirement. Workers are in constant contact with chemical fertilizers, have lengthy exposure to refrigerated lockers, and spend the greater portion of the day standing bent-over, resulting in varicose veins. Migrant workers in zones of commercial agriculture live under horrendous conditions, lacking basic services and
without access to adequate medical care, which adds to their work-related health problems (Arizpe, 1989; Astorga, 1985; Robles et. al, 1993; Velázquez, 1992). The state has not enforced legislation surrounding these issues (Barrón, 1994).

Several researchers have predicted that the feminization of these labour markets is flexible, and a later “masculinization” could occur. Growing rural poverty under the current policies of economic restructuring may lead to the generalization of this work scheme towards other groups; women may have served to ‘open the breach’ in the same way this has occurred in the case of manufacturing and mass production systems, most notably the maquiladoras (Lara, 1995). Furthermore, the creation of a land market due to changes in the agrarian reform law and lack of credit options for small producers (PRONASOL) will increase the supply of male labour, which may begin to compete for women’s posts and cause a sexual recomposition of the agriculture labour market (Barrón, 1994). As Lara (in press) points out: “this situation will be transitory for agriculture, but not for rural women, who do not have other job alternatives in the rural environment” (23). In the meantime, the quality of employment in this sector is not expected to improve considering that these capitalist operations—which rely on a low wage advantage rather than one based on productivity—have also had to face up to a more competitive global market place and to undergo major restructuring (Lara, in press). Women workers in these sectors constitute an integral component of global capitalist restructuring. Like Arizpe and Aranda’s (1981) findings in the strawberry fields of Michoacán, women’s disadvantaged position in the labour market will continue to provide the “comparative advantages” for producers in Mexico (Arizpe, 1989).15

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15In the first sexenio (six-year presidential term) following the debt crisis (1982-1987), commercial agriculture—which is highly dependent on waged labour—was able to overcome the crisis in part due to the deterioration of rural salaries. It is calculated that the average rural wage fell drastically in real terms in this period (39%) while the gross profits derived from large scale commercial agriculture for export rose (Velázquez 1992).
3.3.4 Homework and Factory work: Rural Manufacturing, Maquiladoras, Petty Commerce and Female Labour

Apart from the rising incorporation of rural women in urban service sector employment and waged agricultural labour, women have incorporated themselves into other income-generating activities. This section highlights some areas that have been the focus of recent study: rural manufacturing, maquiladora employment, and petty commerce. 

*Rural Manufacturing*

Another area of paid employment which rural women have progressively entered since the 1970s and where they constitute the majority of the workforce is industrial labour. In the last two decades, many businesses have sought out rural (female) labour in order to remain competitive through the establishment of industrial parks in rural areas or close to small cities, or through small- to medium-sized workshops linked to larger commercial enterprises that subcontract women’s labour to carry out tasks within their homes (González, 1994). This type of production has been extended to many communities in the Bajío, Michoacán, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, and the State of Mexico (González, 1994; Robles et al., 1993; Velásquez, 1992). Unlike other alternatives, this form of employment has allowed women to remain in their communities of origin.

The characteristics of this employment are very similar to those of agro-industrial enterprises. Work is temporary and unstable--fluctuating in intensity throughout the year--and offers low wages. The majority of workers are female with socio-demographic profiles similar to agro-industry employees (young, single, etc.) (Velázquez, 1992). Like domestic workers, most seek work in the factories and workshops until they marry. Their wages are not destined to personal expenses, but to help maintain their families. In zones of high male emigration to the United States, women’s employment in these enterprises--factories, workshops, homeworking--has become essential to their household’s survival (Arias, 1988). This trend, however, extends beyond communities with high male emigration (González, 1994).
The most poorly paid activity of rural manufacturing is homework (subcontracting done in the home) (see Benería and Roldán, 1987, for a case study of urban ‘homework’). This phenomenon has become so widespread in some states that Arfás (1988) estimated that in only eight Guanajuato municipalities, over 14 thousand women were subcontracted to knit clothing. Some of the activities involve sewing, embroidering, or knitting garments; assembling cardboard boxes; packaging ornaments; etc. These activities allow women (married, household heads) with heavy domestic burdens to engage in remunerated work since they can work out of their homes (see Benería and Roldán, 1987). This type of rural manufacturing is often found in small towns that are difficult to access (Velázquez, 1992). The level of labour exploitation in such enterprises is great; homeworkers are paid extremely poor wages and have no form of labour protection. Sometimes women are required to provide equipment such as sewing machines or knitting needles (Velázquez, 1992). With current business initiatives to become more “flexible” it can be expected that subcontracting out to small industrial workshops or to individual households will continue to increase.

Maquiladoras

Perhaps the most well-documented “feminized” sector is the maquiladora enterprise, which proliferated in close proximity to the Mexico-U.S. border (Adamanche, Culos, and Otero, 1995). While in the first maquiladoras close to 90% of employees were women, two principal factors have contributed to the “de-feminization” of the statistics since the late 1980s: the diversification of this sector into new areas of production considered “male” occupations and the disciplining of the male labour force to accept maquiladora working conditions (Sklair, 1990; Tiano, 1987). There is now substantial documentation of the working conditions in these production sites (see Fernández-Kelly 1983, 1989; Sklair 1990; Tiano 1987). Work days exceed the legal minimum, with few, brief breaks; workers suffer extreme physical expenditure; and workers are subject to
prolonged exposure to toxic substances that have caused irreversible damage to their bodies and those of their unborn children.

Many of the employees in the maquiladoras are from nearby rural areas or migrants from diverse rural communities in the Mexican territory (González, 1994). Like other feminized sectors, the owners of maquiladora enterprises justify their hiring practices by claiming certain ‘feminine’ traits predispose women to the production process.

*Petty Commerce*

In many regions in Mexico, petty commerce is a women’s activity with pre-colonial origins. The range of activities is enormous, from the sale of agricultural surplus, to Avon cosmetics, to high-value crafts. Petty commerce is an income-generating activity that women see as highly compatible with their domestic work and childcare (González, 1994). The research on this gamut of activities is limited; a few examples include Arizpe’s (1975) study on itinerant sellers in Mexico City; Chiñas’ (1975) of Zapotec market sellers of the Tehuantepec isthmus; and Mejía’s (1990) study of the marketing of crafts in the Northern Sierra of Puebla (González, 1994).

These and other studies have pointed out that petty commerce is one of most flexible forms of income-generation for women. It can be taken up in periods of need and dropped when other activities complicate it. In some cases it requires very little initial investment. It is also an activity in which women experience relative success. Institutional support for women’s participation in petty commerce, however, is almost non-existent (Aranda, 1993). One of the only obstacles to women’s participation in small-scale commerce is cultural restrictions on women’s mobility (González, 1994). In some communities, women’s involvement in petty commerce implies that a man is not a capable provider. In many situations, women sellers have confronted violence on the part of their husbands.
3.5 Final Reflections

The above sections have explored portions of the broadening body of literature on gender and the transforming Mexican countryside. Although research in this area is scant in comparison to the volumes generated during the campesinista/descampesinista debates, it has made significant advances in recognizing the crossroads of gender with class, and thus the interaction of other conditions, such as ethnicity, or age. Furthermore, it is essential for understanding what is going on in the Mexican countryside. One of the principal goals of this chapter was to point to the role of gender in capitalist accumulation and economic restructuring—how the subordination of rural women has functioned to capital’s benefit—and the role of the state in this process.

In Mexico, the peasant economy has been gradually but drastically decapitalized, forming the cheap labour flows that have been essential to past and present economic restructuring on national and international levels and the production of cheap food supplies. These labour flows not only provide "cheap" workers and goods for productive processes, but play an important function in disciplining other workers beyond Mexico’s borders. Whether these be male migrants in Los Angeles working for sub-minimum wages or providing cheap ‘informal’ services, or young women packing roses for 12 hours a day for US$ 4.00, their effects are felt in labour markets globally. Furthermore, labour flows from Mexico, inscribed differentially according to gender, age, ethnicity, social class, have one thing in common: they rely on women’s unpaid labour in the household to reproduce them. The conditions under which this had occurred, however, have progressively deteriorated and presented more of a challenge. The peasant economy entered into crisis in the 1960, increasing in intensity in the decades that followed; the national economy suffered crises in the early 1970s; and the debt crisis in 1982 ushered in a new development model and a series of crises that culminated in the 1994 peso devaluation. Each successive crisis has made the conditions of life in the countryside more precarious. Women have not only taken up new tasks within their homes, but incorporated themselves
into a host of income-generating activities, including waged work, in order to ensure the survival of their families.

In this sense domestic work can be considered a set of survival strategies that upholds the peasant household in times of crises, crucial to maintaining rural families as they experience further immiseration as a result of the current round of economic restructuring. These “coping mechanisms” and “survival strategies” which have the household as their site of origin are not simply reactions to a ruthless economic model but also cultural struggles against processes that threaten the ways of life of women and their families (Escobar, 1995). For example, the ‘feminization’ of milpa agriculture in zones of high male migration must be recognized not only as a struggle for the sustenance of their families, but for the maintenance of a way of life that is centuries in the making. When women take up new roles in executing new strategies for survival—such as plowing or driving a tractor—they are also engaging in gender struggles. In the process, poor women also negotiate power, build collective identities, and create critical perspectives on the world in which they live (Escobar, 1995; Lind, 1993).

Although rural women engage in innumerable strategies of resistance in their day-to-day life, broadening struggles into a global arena of action has only just begun. In many of Mexico’s rural and urban areas, the privatization of the economy has been accompanied by a privatization of struggles for survival within the household (Benería, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Grindle, 1988). Rather than making public the globalizing effects of neoliberalism, many households have been ashamed of their growing poverty, internalizing their struggles. Furthermore, rural women’s organization has not been particularly effective. In terms of organizational strength before the state, they represent one of most exploited yet least articulated social groups. Although they have organized themselves to press their demands and have participated greatly in political struggles, these have always taken place

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16 Small cornfields, often sown with different combinations of beans and squash.
within male-dominated institutions for the peasantry as class, rather than coming initially from a gender trajectory.

Nonetheless, rural women’s organization has a history with deep roots (Lara, 1995) and that is currently active in various regions (see Aranda, 1988; Nash, 1994; Stephen, 1996). The most interesting developments in this regard are perhaps those emerging from the Lacandon forest, a site where women--and men--are in the process of breaking and creating gender-relation schematics. In the process of struggling against the global project of neoliberalism--the most recent chapter in a history of exploitation, genocide, and environmental destruction their communities have experienced--they are making the most significant advances in the re-valorization of rural women. Furthermore, the Zapatista struggle has presented the most effective offensive to the neoliberal project because it has become internationalized. As Nash (1994) points out the false opposition of First and Third Worlds must be discarded in order to grasp the commonalities of the welfare problems facing women (and others) both in “developed” economies and poorer nations, recognizing subsistence and survival activities emerging all over the globe as a “central arena for the development of consciousness and action based on the right to live in the present crisis of capitalism” (10).
On the rocky, white-limed, arid hills of the Tentzo Cordillera, an hour's ride south-east of Puebla City, lies the community of San Miguel Acuxecomac. Several kilometres from the irrigated lands of the Valsequillo dam, this community relies on rain-fed agricultural production on the Tentzo's rugged, dry hillsides. The basic reproduction strategy of San Migueleño families traditionally consisted of the cultivation of corn, beans, and squash, as well as wheat; the gathering of herbs; livestock production of goats, sheep, donkeys, and pigs; and the crafting of articles made from palm.

San Migueleños have progressively diversified their sources of income since the 1940s, thus decreasing reliance on agriculture as a central livelihood. Chapter 2 outlined the process by which national development priorities subordinated peasant agriculture to urban industrialization and the growth of commercial agriculture. In San Miguel, various factors at the local scale are also linked to the deteriorating profitability of farming: the absence of irrigation, over-farming, demographic pressure, soil erosion and climatic change. These factors, combined with the decreased profitability of craft production, has led to the proliferation of survival strategies which clearly are stratified by gender and age. The most obvious of these has been the increasing exodus of male labour power to national and international labour markets (D'Aubeterre, 1992). The first waves of male emigration in the 1940s initially took a cyclical pattern that coincided with the agricultural calendar. Today, extended absences of males, some as young as 15, is commonplace. Migration to the U.S. has become an established stage in any young man's life.

Lack of male labour in San Miguel has resulted in increased involvement of women, children and the elderly in direct cultivation of the family parcel, which acts as an important safety net despite high costs of production and low yields that barely meet
subsistence needs. Although this has come at a high physical cost for those who have replaced emigrated labour, most notably adult women, San Migueleños continue to pursue subsistence production and exercise their agrarian rights. Experience has revealed that remittance income is contingent on a variety of factors outside their control. Remittances have improved the situation for many families; however, others have experienced a more precarious existence as some migrants desert their families. Adult women have not only broadened their role in subsistence activities but have also worked to uphold the cultural fabric of San Miguel—nurturing family and social ties; participating in community institutions; and carrying out socio-religious activities.

Livelihood strategies in San Miguel centered on emigration are unlikely to change under the present circumstances. Public investment has been limited, and thus incapable of generating a local supply of complementary resources that could promote economies of scale or reduce production costs. Thus as neoliberal government policies increasingly turn away from subsistence-based producers in order to rationalize the Mexican countryside under neoliberal reform (Chapter One), emigration continues to figure centrally in the reproductive strategies of San Migueleño households. Agricultural production is facing new obstacles and government ‘welfare’ programs are proving to be ineffectual. Furthermore, day-to-day survival in the aftermath of the neoliberal disaster has become more uncertain with surging inflation and contracting local employment opportunities.

This chapter begins with an overview of the community, including land tenure and agricultural production. It follows the development of alternative income-generating strategies with the entrance of San Migueleños—male and female—into labour markets: as braceros in Los Angeles; as door-to-door vendors of meats in Mexico City; as domestics in Puebla; and as itinerant fruit vendors in Los Angeles. The chapter concentrates on exploring the current strategies San Migueleños have employed alongside emigration patterns. With a specific focus on gender relations, it shows how neoliberal measures—which have increased the community’s dependence on cash remittances and done little to
foment agricultural production--are causing migration patterns and strategies at the household level to change. The chapter is principally informed by interviews with San Miguelepia women from a variety of household situations at different stages in their life cycle (Appendix 1). Additional interviews were conducted with community members such as the Ejido Commissariat and migrant workers (Appendix 4).

4.1 OVERVIEW: SAN MIGUEL ACUEXCOMAC

San Miguel Acuxcomac is located in the heart of the Tentzo Cordillera at 2000 kilometres above sea level, 35 kilometres south-east of the capital city of Puebla. A 12 kilometre stretch of unpaved road leaves San Miguel, twisting and turning through the rugged territory until it connects to a paved highway just a short distance south of the M. Avila Camacho (Valsequillo) dam for the remainder of the route to Puebla. The community is framed to the north by the Atoyac River; to the south, by the Tentzo Cordillera; to the west, by the Balbaneda hacienda; and to the east, by the municipality seat, San Juan Tzicatlacoyan (Fig.4.1; Appendix 6).

Fig. 4.1. San Miguel, nestled in the skirts of the Tentzo Cordillera
During the dry season, approaching San Miguel at midday can scorch the visitor's eye with the glare from the white, rocky, eroded soil, covered only in few places with sparse vegetation. The predominant physiography of the land is characterized by low-lying steep hills and thin soils, making agricultural lands vulnerable to erosion by overgrazing and deforestation (Fig.4.2).

Fig.4.2 Milpa field cultivated without the help of fertilizer

These traits limit the region's agricultural possibilities; the soils can only absorb a restricted amount of water and soil degradation is high (Inzunza et al., 1988). The climate of the zone is temperate sub-humid, with an annual precipitation varying between 400-700 cubic millimetres and an annual average temperature of 17°C. According to a Plan Puebla report: "the precipitation, characterized by a poor distribution throughout the year and over periods of years, is associated with the restrictive conditions of the land, making the problems that agriculture in this region confronts even worse" (Inzunza et al., 1988:9, my translation). Evergreen oak, shrubs, cactus, <i>onate</i>, and palm can be found on the hills and
ravines surrounding the community. The vegetation is utilized by San Migueleños for animal feed, firewood, construction materials, farming implements, household consumption, crafts, and medicines. Since the use of vegetation is extractive, species are suffering a decline in both qualitative and quantitative terms, and deforestation is currently a pressing ecological issue (Efraín Inzunza, interview, October 1994).

The population of San Miguel is approximately 2,250, grouped in 226 domestic units which have an average of seven to eight members (D'Aubeterre, 1995). The community has experienced considerable demographic growth in the 20th century; when the community was requesting a land grant (1924-1929) on the heels of the Revolution, population was estimated at a mere 354 residents (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 26 July 1929). Although poverty is generalized throughout the community, San Miguel is not homogenous in socio-economic terms. Residents are differentiated by diverse levels of monetary income, consumption, production outlays, and savings.

The communities of the Tentzo Cordillera are often referred to as marking the beginnings of the Mixtec indigenous zone (D'Aubeterre, 1995; Inzunza et al., 1988). Anthropologists familiar with the territorial boundaries of indigenous communities dispute this assertion, claiming that the Mixteca zone does not begin until the state of Puebla's southern extremes (Culturas Populares, October 1995). Residents do not speak mixtec; however, before the Revolution and the establishment of rural schools in the 1920s, the inhabitants of San Miguel Acuexcomac were speakers of náhautl, a language which today is spoken by only a handful of ancient residents:

The old people still speak Mexicano. I understand it, because my father and my mother spoke in Mexicano. [...] Well, they taught us, but when we went to school we never talked like that anymore. [...] Acuexcomac is Mexicano. Well little by little we have lost it. When the teachers came, we

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1 Bearing a náhautl name, otate is characterized by a single, strong, central branch extending several metres when full grown. Resembling bamboo from Indochina, otate is used in house construction, roofing, and the manufacturing of baskets and fans.

2 Most náhautl-speaking communities refer to their language as "mexicano," the language of the Mexica (Aztec) people.
didn’t go back to speaking *Mexicano*. When we went to school, only Spanish. (Doña Esperanza, A-2, September 1994).

Children frequently return from shepherding with what San Migueleños call “Gentiles”—pre-Columbian artifacts with the faces of the “people who ate their own children” (Doña María, A-5, March 1995). The name of the town—A-cuex-comatl—is a náhautl word meaning container that carries water. According to an engraved stone in one of the church walls, the community of San Miguel Arcangel (Saint Michael Archangel) was founded in 1765.

Fig. 4.3 *An Ejido Assembly in the zócalo*

The town plan of San Miguel has almost a rectangular shape, with 17 unpaved streets running north to south and 13 running east to west (D’Aubeterre, 1995). Dwellings are concentrated around the zócalo (central plaza), following Spanish patterns of colonialism (Fig 4.3). To the south of the plaza lies the *Presidencia Auxiliar Municipal* (Municipal Auxiliary Presidency), the post office, and the health centre; to the north, several dwellings; to the east, the church; and to the west, the primary school. Most
dwellings are surrounded by *solares* (open yards) with a *calmil* (small area under cultivation). Near the *calmil* is the *cencali*, for grain storage. Other structures include the *temascal* (steam bath); a large stone oven for baking bread for the Day of the Dead (November 2); animal corrals often constructed with *quiote* (posts derived from *maguey*); and an exterior kitchen, often of palm. These palm houses were the former dwellings of San Miguelinos before the establishment of migration networks in the 1940s and the community’s access to cash income. Most homes today are constructed of industrial materials (brick, cement block); stone; and/or adobe.

Before the people from here began going to Los Angeles, there were just palm houses. They just started to go, everyone, to Los Angeles, they came back, and made their brick houses, [with] cement roofing. More and more, they went to work in the United States and returned to make their modern brick house with a cement roof. So then they all started to go, with this excitement, 'I am going to go and make a house just like What's-His-Name, and we started to lose this, the *zacute* houses. Before, there were just *zacute* houses, throughout the whole town. Now you see that there are many modern homes. But this is all of our work (Don Moisés, A-30, September 1994).³

The construction of a home from industrial materials complete with electrical wiring reflects significant, combined efforts over several years of migrants and their families. When one is erected, family and friends hold a *colado* (roofing ceremony) to celebrate the event.

Most dwellings in San Miguel have only one room, which serves as both a sleeping and eating area. In many homes, a gas stove can be found in here. However, when the gas has run out or household finances are restricted, many families prepare their food over the *tlecuil* (an open fire for cooking) in the well-ventilated exterior kitchens made from palm, *carrizo* (hardened corn stalks), or scrap metal sheeting. Apart from gas ovens some families have refrigerators. Several families have their own corn mill, and charge a small fee to grind others’ *nixtamal*.

³All quotes from participants are my translations.
In the main dwelling space, furniture is generally sparse. Most families have been able to purchase one or two beds. However, petates—the sleeping mats San Migueleños are accustomed to—are still found rolled up in the corners in each home. No dwelling is without its family altar, which is strewn with flowers, pictures and replicas of several saints (predominantly San Miguel and the Virgin of Guadalupe) who have American dollar bills pinned to their clothes. Most families also have a television and a stereo. On the walls are glossy posters of past and present pop stars—Madonna, the Broncos, Selena—pinned up alongside plastic-protected photographs of loved ones in “el norte”.

Fig. 4.4 Two women preparing breakfast in an exterior kitchen

San Miguel has been listed as a town in the State Territorial Divisions (División Territorial del Estado) since 1902, and is today categorized as a Junta Auxiliar Municipal.\footnote{A literal translation would be Auxiliary Municipal Seat, reflecting the ranking system in Mexican municipalities. The municipal head is followed by several Auxiliary Municipal Seats, towns, suburbs, etc.} Residents claim that before the Revolution, the municipal seat was San Miguel, and not the neighbouring town, San Juan Tzicatlacoyan, as it stands today. This
has led to considerable friction between the two villages, especially for San Migueleños, who claim that the municipality fails to share the revenues meant for all communities under its jurisdiction. An important gain for San Miguel in 1984 was to be awarded its own civil registry, apart from San Juan.

The *ejido* of San Miguel was formed in 1929 after five years of petitioning, with lands appropriated from the Balbaneda hacienda, consisting of 1,466 hectares for 118 household heads. A one-room Federal Primary school began operation in 1933, a date which marks the gradual displacement of *náhautl* by the Spanish language. More classrooms were added in 1982, when the *Padres de Familia de la Escuela Primaria* (Parents of the Primary School Committee) petitioned residents to provide a piece of land for new classrooms at the entrance to town. The kindergarten and the tele-secondary school were also set up in 1982.

A Health Centre type "C" of the Ministry of Health was established in 1987, the same year a CONASUPO store was installed in the *zócalo*. Other services include the introduction of electricity to all homes in (1975); mail services (1986); and potable water (1989). Partial government funding for this last service is a result of the lobbying efforts of women and men involved the Grupo La Mujer Campesina (Peasant Women's Group). The introduction of piped, potable water was an important time-saving achievement; before, families had to haul water from the river and women had to devote at least a day washing clothes.

In 1988, telephone lines to Puebla were erected, and a year later long distance telephone service was available. Not surprisingly, the ceremonial first telephone call was placed to Los Angeles, California. A handful of families have their own phones, but most calls are made from the pharmacy/grocery store on the south-east corner of the *zócalo*. This is one of the most visited stores and a popular hang-out. Apart from this centrally-located store and the CONASUPO, there are also a number of smaller stores selling a variety of goods, one of which provides Xerox photocopy services. Fresh fruits and
vegetables are limited in availability. Many residents have a limited consumption of these goods apart from their recaudo (tomatoes, chile, onions, cilantro) that complements the regular diet of beans, tortillas, rice. The recaudo can be bought in San Miguel, but many residents make visits to Puebla or Tepeaca once a week.

Before the introduction of buses, which did not begin to run on a regular basis until 15 years ago, San Migueleños followed the trails on foot or by burro to the market held on Fridays in Tepeaca. There they bartered wild herbs native to the area or pumpkin seeds for recaudo or earthen-ware dishes (D'Aubeterre, 1995). Today, collective transport buses leave San Miguel at various times of the day, following the 12 kilometre trajectory of unpaved road to the dam and then on to the highway that leads to Puebla. Another 14 kilometres of unpaved road, open in 1987, connects San Miguel through San Trinidad Tianguismanalco to Tecali and Tepeaca (Appendix 6). The bus service to Tepeaca is available Fridays.

The present infrastructure and services available in San Miguel do not reflect government initiatives to develop rural areas and correct urban biases, but rather the initiative of San Migueleños themselves to pool cash remittances to conform their community to urban prototypes.

The health centre was made completely with money from the United States. Haven’t you seen the plaque, what it says? The plaque says that ‘this health centre is from all the youths in the United States.’ It wasn’t the [Mexican] government [...] We are many, and we all pitch in. The tele-secondary school also was made by all those who are there [in the north]. The government also didn’t construct the tele-secondary school. We put it there. Now the [primary] schools in the centre of town, they are the town’s, not the government’s [...] The town put in the telephone. The town put in the postal service, too. [...] Potable water? Also by us. Three hundred dollars each for the donation. [...] All this road here, it’s San Miguel’s ... that bridge, is San Miguel’s, San Miguel money. It’s not the government’s. It’s not federal, and if it is, it was made by the town. There are a lot of things that government doesn’t provide (Don Bernardo, A-31, October 1994).
The most recent achievements of community cooperas (pooled funds)--largely paid for with remittances--are the perforation of the well and the network of potable water (1989).

4.2 FROM WEAVING BASKETS TO SELLING BANANAS: TRANSFORMATIONS IN SAN MIGUEL
4.2.1 Land and Liberty

Those who became San Miguel’s first ejidatarios could not have possibly imagined their children working in Los Angeles when they began their turn-of the century struggle for Land and Liberty. When asked about their revolutionary history, the flight of the Porfirian hacendado from armed campesinos is popular among accounts by San Migueleños. The ejido’s Carpeta Básica, the community’s archive of their agrarian history, records that San Miguel began petitioning for an endowment of land in May of 1924. At the time, the community consisted of small property owners and/or peasants who had worked on the Hacienda of Balvaneda. In addition to being small producers, they were also craftspeople, producing two principal items made of palm and otrade. Petates--flexible woven mats--were crafted by women, and chiquihuites, large, sturdy baskets--were crafted by men (Fig. 4.5). In 1924, 115 persons out of a total community of 354 came forth as petitioners under Mexico’s agrarian reform project as household heads and men older than 18 years of age. The initial document read:

the lands to be affected are for the most part mountain and hills, there are 396 hectares of land for cultivation, rain-fed lands of lesser quality [...] the land of the hacienda of Valvaneda [sic] is rugged and mountainous, having one part of low-lying hills that could be utilized in their entirety for cultivation; the crops that these lands are dedicated to are corn, beans, and wheat [...] the hacienda of Valvaneda [sic] is the property of Guillermo Hinzpetter, the livelihood of people of the zone is the chiquihuite manufacturing industry; the hacienda of Valvaneda produces an abundance of otrade that the town uses for the chiquihuite industry, and the townspeople have much interest in the endowment of the mountain, seeing as the crop lands are scarce and of poor quality (untitled document in Carpeta Básica, 1924).5

5The Carpeta Básica, the community’s archive of their agrarian history, is under the care of each current Ejido Commissariat.
It was not until 1929 that the town of San Miguel was granted their *ejido* lands. 118 peasants were granted individual parcels and use of communal pasture for a total of 1,466 hectares: 424 hectares of rain-fed crop lands and 1,042 hectares of hillside pasture (*Tribunal Unitario Agrario Del Vigésimo Cuarto Distrito*, N.d.). More recent ethnographies calculate the community relies on 375 hectares of *ejido* lands for cultivation, 900 hectares of *ejido* lands which are hillside, and 40 hectares of *ejido* land that are rocky grazing land (*D’Aubeterre, 1995; Salcido, 1991*). This is complemented by 156.8 hectares of small parcels of private property, that date back before the revolution.

Fig.4.5 *Seated on a petate, a Migueleño weaves a chiquihuite*

In San Miguel, land is an extremely limited resource. Demographic pressures have intensified, resulting in increasing *minifundismo*:

The first *ejidatarios* had a lot of land. The town was smaller. There was enough for four, five hectares. Up to seven hectares. They were the first ones to take up lands. But later on, the children got less: a hectare, half a

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*The dividing up of land into increasingly smaller parcels; the size of these reduced parcels often does not permit profitable cultivation.*
hectare, because there wasn’t any left. The town had grown. There were more people. There wasn’t enough for everyone (Don Moisés, a-30, September 1994).

A 1985 report totals the number of *ejidatarios* at 118; ten years later 157 *ejido* title holders were registered. In 1996, that number was officially registered as 198 *ejidatarios*.

Researchers from the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla conducted a detailed questionnaire of 53 households in 1991 which addressed land tenure (D’Aubeterre, 1992). In their sample, 86% of households had *ejido* land and/or private property, while 13.7% had no land of their own. Of this last group, the majority share-cropped. Other households with just a small portion of land or land of poor quality also engaged in sharecropping. The greater part of households interviewed (84.2%) had less than three hectares, even when both *ejido* land and private property were considered.

Chart 4.1 Size of Parcels According to Property System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of hectares</th>
<th><em>Ejido</em> Land (%)</th>
<th>Small Property (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
<th>Accumulated Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From 0 - 0.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 1.0 - 1.9</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 2.0 - 2.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 3.0 - 3.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 4 or more</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: D’Aubeterre, 1995)

A 1992 study confirms their reports: 43 out of 55 households (72% of sample) had land ranging between 0.5 hectares to 2.0 hectares; and 12 families (22% of sample) did not have land (Salcido, 1991). Land is often not held in a single parcel but dispersed into several, some as small as one quarter of a hectare.

Land, in its majority, is held by men. Like most communities in the Central Plateau (Gónzalez, 1988), in San Miguel:

the predominant domestic cycle is characterized by patrivirilocal postmarital residence, conditioned by the norm of patrilineal inheritance, the preponderance of inheritance of the paternal home and *solar* for the youngest son [...] and the definition of women as marginal inheritors of land (D’Aubeterre, 1995:267, my translation).
Doña Liliana explains:

My father had [land], but because I was a woman, I didn’t get the ejido. My brother got it, my two brothers. But because they left for Mexico City, they no longer were working here. So the land remained with another boy. I didn’t get the land over there, in the fields (A-1, October, 1994).

Of 157 ejidatarios in San Miguel in 1991, less than 15% were women: “here things remain with the men, and the women ... well, maybe [private] properties but not the ejidos” (Doña María, A-5, September 1994).

4.2.2 Challenges to agriculture as a viable reproduction strategy

Agricultural production in San Miguel has not changed significantly since the 1940s. Milpa cultivation has always dominated agricultural production due to the invariable, minor rainfall and the specific soil conditions. Like other rain-fed, mountainous regions, corn is incomparable to other crops in its capacity to adapt to the different environments that exist in a micro-region, thus minimizing production risks (García and García, 1994). The agricultural cycle in San Miguel begins with the beginning of the rainy season in May. The land is prepared and planted. June, July and August are dedicated to la labor--cultivating the growing plant and weeding. There are few tasks until November, when the despunte (the cutting of the top of the corn stalk at the point where cobs begin) is done, and December (harvest). Wheat complements corn production in those years when a more abundant rainfall is expected:

The earth is very solid. Viscous lands. They call it tezoquites, that’s what they say here if the earth is very solid. Very tough. The seed wants a lot of water in order to grow. And now, it doesn’t rain more than once or twice. The wheat didn’t come up (Doña Liliana, A-1, February 1995).

The rainy season is very insufficient, it doesn’t rain much now. Now we don’t harvest a lot like we did before [...] because the rains are very scarce. Now it doesn’t rain much in the period when the fields need it. Because at the moment when the fields need the rain, it has to rain in order for the milpa to grow. And if it doesn’t rain, the milpa dries and we lose the crop (Doña Lolita, A-10, March 1995).
The lack of control over water resources occurs despite the existence of abundant subterranean water sources. Tapping this source, however, would involve heavy capital outlays. Since government funding would only be partial, San Migueleños are divided over pooling their own funds for the expenses of geographical studies and the perforation of wells. It is also possible that irrigation would further erode the existing soil base, given the soils are thin, many fields are located on steep ground, and some soil types score low on their ability to retain water (Inzunza et al., 1988).

Soil erosion has accelerated over the years, as peasant households continue to cut down trees and shrubs for household fuels needs. Vegetation plays an important role in soil conservation on the steep skirts of the Tentzo. Given the limited access to cash resources facing the majority of peasant households, it is unlikely that natural gas (purchased) will completely replace firewood (no cost) as cooking fuel. Firewood not only meets the community’s needs; it is also sold to outside merchants, as a income-generating strategy for some Migueleños. The Ejido Commissariat has attempted to curtail the practice by limiting the amount of wood people are allowed to cut and the number of days they can harvest it, but these rules are contingent to his three-year term and open to change according his successor’s interest in halting deforestation.

Highly variable and deteriorating conditions have resulted in inconsistent yields from the milpa: “[last year we harvested] only a little [corn], about 50 kilos. Now we are going to harvest more, about 200 kilos or more” (Doña María, A-5, September 1994). San Migueleños claim that in 1993, the rainy season was two months over-due, yet in 1994 there was enough precipitation to harvest wheat in addition to corn. A regional assessment of Tentzo producers gauges average yields obtained at: 1,032 kilogram/hectare (kg/ha.) with a range of 200-2,000 kg. and 283 kg. of beans/has. with a range of 100-600 kg. (Inzunza, et. al. 1988). In San Miguel, Salcido (1991) claims yields vary between 1-2 tons per hectare. In her sample, of the 43 families with land, 18 had yields between 50-500 kg/ha. corn; 9 had more than half a ton; 9 had more than a ton; 3 had more than 2
tons; and the remaining 4 claimed that there was no production. With these types of yields, the production barely satisfies subsistence needs. On occasions, it does not last the year and the family must purchase from the CONASUPO store. However, some families sell surplus beans on a minor scale. None of the households in San Miguel generate significant monetary income from milpa agriculture.

Fig. 4.6 Separating the grain from the chaff of a wheat harvest

Low returns have discouraged heavy cash investments in agricultural production.

One peasant farmer explains some of the costs she incurred in corn production:

The plowman earned N$ 300. The person who prepared this land charged me—not prepared by tractor, but by oxen—N$ 400. And with N$ 300, that's N$ 700. For the peones, to hire the ones to weed—Lorena Martínez went—I paid N$ 12 each one, N$ 12 to her, N$ 12 to her mother, it was six days and it came out to be about N$ 70, 80. A week. Now it's been two weeks. Can you imagine how much I invested, güera? Now what

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7 The deficiencies of these yields are more apparent if noted in reference to consumption: the daily preparation of tortilla dough (corn) for a family of eight people made up of five adults and three children is at least 10 kg, for a total of 3,650 kg/year (D'Aubeterre, 1995).

8 A popular name for foreigners who are fair-skinned.
remains? Zacate⁹, squash, and the corn. This is the most that I have. A
ton of corn almost costs the same (Doña María, A-5, November 1994).

Seeds for the milpa have never been purchased. They are criollo (wild) germplasm with
great genetic diversity, and thus carry centuries of genetic adaptation to their inhospitable
environment. Wheat seeds are purchased. Chemical fertilizers are also purchased. The
use of chemical fertilizer was most likely introduced under the Plan Puebla project that
recommended a certain ratio for the community’s soils in order to improve productivity. ¹⁰

Some producers claim that the soil has become fertilizer dependent:

In one parcel, güera, I do [use fertilizer] because as you know the land has
the bad habit of relying on it. Now it wants fertilizer. The land is used to
it. But if you never put fertilizer on a land ... [...] Like myself, I didn’t,
down over there [indicating] and the huge squashes! Really beautiful ones,
and I didn’t apply fertilizer (Doña María, A-5, November 1994).

Other elements of the local technology of production, the stick plow and oxen, also
potentially involve costs for those families that must hire someone to bring their equipment
and get the job done. Those with their own animals and available male labour avoid this
significant expense. Tractors are also used in the few flat areas that have been cleared of
rocks. The fees to plow a field with a tractor are almost the same as the fees to plow a
field with oxen, since the traditional method requires several days work as opposed to
several hours with a tractor.

The type of labour employed in production differs from producer to producer,
depending on factors such as their socio-economic situation, their access to a cash income,
the amount of available labour, and the affective bonds in their real and fictive kin
relationships.¹¹ Family (unpaid) labour is the most common labour used. At a young age

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⁹ Zacate refers to the corn plant used for animal feed.

¹⁰ Plan Puebla was an internationally known agricultural experiment conducted in the Puebla Valley in the
1960s. A Green Revolution initiative, Plan Puebla was based on a program of agricultural research and
rural development aimed at increasing the corn yields of peasant farmers by using local varieties plus
agrochemicals.

¹¹ Fictive kin refers here to godparents (padrinos: madrina/padrino) and co-parents (compadres: copadre/
comadre). These relationships are created around a number social and religious events. For example,
when a woman has a child graduating from primary school, she may ask another woman to be the
children are involved in milpa production, if just along to tend to younger children as the mothers work. By seven years old they are weeding and harvesting. Both men and women in San Miguel are involved in direct agricultural production, but there a few tasks that are clearly the domain of one gender. For example, the guiding of the oxen—la yunta—is only to be undertaken by men: "There are jobs for women and jobs for men. Because a woman cannot support the yunta, carry the yunta when the bulls run. And men can" (Doña Liliana, A-1, October 1994).

Additional labour outside the family is required for certain agricultural tasks, such as in the case of harvesting, whereby a family's parcels are completed in a day by a crew of approximately 30 children and adults. The workers are not paid a monetary wage; rather, the labour is repaid in kind, as the following day the crew harvests the parcels of another member of the team. The teams are usually made up of blood relatives and compadres. They are personally invited by the owner of the crop. Those with limited family resources to draw upon or those with an assured cash income may contract peones (field hands), which constitutes a third type of labour which is paid. The tendency to pay field labour in money is new to San Miguel, coinciding with the monetarization of the economy. At the time of research, field workers were earning N$ 10, 12-15, or 25 (US$ 1.30, $2.00, or $3.50), for children, women, and men, respectively. Women earn half of what men earn and half of what women workers in nearby zones of irrigated agriculture earn. Not surprisingly, these 'cheap' workers are those that make up the majority of the ranks of hired field labour: "Now we almost only hire women because there are no men here. Now they are all gone. They have gone to the north. All the young men are there, all of them" (Doña Rosa, A-15, March 1995). Since field labour is so poorly remunerated, this labour market includes those who have no other choice: those who cannot migrate for work (women with children) and who are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder

godparent for that child, sponsoring related expenses and fulfilling other social obligations. The two women are then co-mothers.
('abandoned' women). The demand for this type of labour is cyclical, depending on the agricultural calendar, and always very minimal, as most peasant farmers rely on family labour.

The raising of livestock has played an important role in peasant reproduction strategies. The principal species are goats, sheep, pigs, donkeys, cows and horses. Some families also raise chickens and turkeys, but due to lack of preventive medicine and adequate corrals, many fall prey to preventable diseases or coyotes. Donkeys are used mainly for transporting people and equipment out to the fields. Bulls and horses are work animals. For those families that own a team, they avoid the cost of renting one for land cultivation and may contract themselves out in the community. Most families own at least one pig, short-tethered to a tree in the yard. Goats and sheep are also owned by many families, who have herds that range from one to over one hundred. The animals are housed in make-shift corrals constructed of natural materials such as quiote, without roofs.

Fig. 4.7 Shearing a sheep
Shepherding is done by women and children. Women take animals out to pasture from eight - nine in the morning until five - six in the afternoon, Monday to Friday. When school gets out at midday, children often relieve the adults of pastoral activities, as well as on weekends and holidays (Fig.4.8). During the dry season, pastoral duties involve a much greater physical expenditure, since women must walk great distances in order to find pasture. Women "consider [pastoral] activity important although they do not receive payment, since through the sale of animals they have money assured for any health emergency, education, or social commitment that is presented to them" (Salcido, 1991).

The following interview demonstrates the importance of livestock:

For any type of [social] commitment or baptism, for example, we kill a sheep, and if we want to make mole\textsuperscript{12}, we make mole, or if we want to make barbacoa\textsuperscript{13}, we make barbacoa. Or if we are going to be a godmother, a godfather of a baptism, but I don't have anything to buy a sheep with, I just take one out of my corral [...] Or, for example, the tradition here if you are going to have a wedding. I am going to invite all my daughters, my compadres, everyone comes [...]. I am going to take eight, or six [sheep] from my corral. These are for the [social] expenditure. All the godparents come [...] and they sit down to eat. I take from corral, I am not purchasing anything. I just buy the pop, beer. People from here, when they invite you to a wedding, you have your sheep, you take it from the corral and you bring it. So then when my son gets married, they have to repay. We help each other out. [...] In the whole town there are a lot of livestock. But we are not selling a lot. For example, over here Doña Elena has more than 50 sheep, as does Doña Leona. They sell them when they need money. Like Doña Leona, her daughter fell off a tree in the pasture, she hurt her spine, and she was admitted to the hospital. They say she was charged a million and a half [N$ 1,500 or US$ 220]. She says 'Now I am going to sell ten sheep. I need money to pay the doctor. She sold her sheep. Where else is she going to take money from?' (Doña Esperanza, A-2, March 1995).

The animals are not prime market quality, as San Miguel lacks programs designed to educate peasant farmers on how to control reproduction, feeding, health, and preventive medicine (Inzunza et al., 1988). Rural field workers claim that one of main weaknesses of

\textsuperscript{12}The traditional dish for celebration, principally made of ground chiles, cinnamon, chocolate, and sesame.

\textsuperscript{13}Meat (usually goat) cooked underground in a pit, and with leaves of maguey.
the animals is poor genetics, since they are not interbred properly (E. Inzunza, personal interview, September 1994). During the dry season a peasant farmer claimed: "If we manage to sell one or two, we really don't have anything because right now the livestock is cheap, it is skinny. It is very thin. It's all the same right now, the livestock isn't worth anything. Right now they don't even buy" (Doña María, A-5, February 1995). In San Miguel today, "the levels of [livestock] production are subsistence, since they only provide temporary income in the case of illness of a family member, or to cover the expenses of social events" (Inzunza et al., 1988:12). The production of livestock is not an effective farming strategy, but one of subsistence. It is also highly extractive in ecological terms.

Fig.4.8 Child Shepherds

4.2.3 The Decline of Agricultural Production As a Central Strategy

Now it is isn't like it was before. Now the young men won't be making chiquihuites. Now they go to Los Angeles; now they go to Mexico City. Now none of youth are raised to know how to make the chiquihuite. Now they leave. You have seen how many young girls leave to work. They're not here anymore. And in the times when we grew up [...] we were
working here with the *petate*. I think we were really stupid. Who knows. Now many young girls leave to work. And before they didn’t leave (Doña Liliana, A-1, October 1994).

Well now it is very difficult, because if you stay here, you don’t manage to support [your children] [...]. If you go to the city to work, you earn the minimum. If you buy some dress shoes and tennis shoes, you can be delayed for a week’s work. For a lot of people, it isn’t enough. [...] Many people from here, from this town, all of them that are there [Los Angeles], have good homes (Don Bernardo, A-31, October 1994).

Increased pressure on the land is just one factor among many that combined to bring about the decline of agricultural activity as a central livelihood strategy in San Miguel. Well into the 1940s, the production of the corn-beans-squash combination, complemented by wheat in years of above average rainfall, formed the basis of peasant reproduction (D’Aubeterre, 1995). Furthermore, the sale or barter of crafts and livestock constituted one of the links with regional markets:

Before the people supported themselves from [the sale of] baskets, men with the baskets, the *chiquihuite*, women with the *petate*. In that time there was material provided by the mountainside, the mountainside was not as destroyed as it is now. 50 year olds, 60 year olds, ten year olds, eight year olds, were in the gully making baskets, from big ones to small ones. And the women would take the palm and work between the two of them, to make *matlanes*¹⁴, one’s turn today, tomorrow the other’s. We went to Puebla up to *la boquilla* [today the Valsequillo dam] or if not, walking to Puebla, to sell the *chiquihuite*. We went via Xilotzingo, over there, the entire hill, until descending via Tejaluca, and there we would go up to San Pedro Achimalpa and San Francisco Teotihuacan. Later, necessity obliged us to look for work, because when I got married we did not go out to work, but we had a trade here (Don Eduardo, 70 years old, cited in D’Aubeterre, 1995, my translation).

As outlined in the preceding section, increased soil erosion on lands that were already of poor quality, the lack of institutional support for agricultural inputs and technical assistance to improve productivity, and changing climatic conditions were among factors that combined with increased demographic pressure on the land to bring about the decline

¹⁴The weaving of petates between two people; one day they both weave one woman’s petate, and the next day they go on to the other’s.
of these craft and agricultural activities and a growing search for alternative livelihoods (D'Aubeterre, 1995; Inzunza et al., 1988; Salcido, 1991). As has been mentioned in earlier chapters, emigration from peasant households since mid-century to date is inextricably linked to the development strategies pursued by the Mexican government which subordinated the peasantry to fuel industrial-led, capitalist development. In general, public investment in San Miguel and the surrounding area has been insignificant, and thus has failed to generate the resources which could promote a more productive, profitable agriculture. San Miguel is a valid case example of a government-neglected ejido community that began to penetrate national and international labour markets shortly after agrarian reform in order to ensure reproduction and also obtain the infrastructure and consumer durables available in urban areas.

San Migueleños have incorporated themselves into international and national labour markets for over four decades. Both men and women are migrants, but compose different migration flows. While men have become undocumented workers in the U.S. since the 1940s and later as informal vendors in Mexico City, the majority of female migrants have been concentrated in domestic service in Puebla and Mexico City. Emigration of women to the United States is a relatively new phenomenon, but one that is on the rise, largely involving young women accompanying their husbands (D'Aubeterre, 1992).

In 1992, D'Aubeterre and Fagetti attempted to gauge the centrality of male migration as a reproduction strategy in San Miguel Acuexcomac. Their findings appear to give a more accurate figure of the extent of migration than regional figures can provide, which estimate emigration of the economically active population at 18% (see Inzunza et al., 1988). For San Miguel, such a figure appears too low an estimate. D'Aubeterre and Fagetti found that, in a 53 household sample, only 8 (15.3%) household heads were dedicated exclusively to agricultural production, 14 (26%) households combined this activity with informal commerce in Mexico City, 2 (3.5%) were dedicated solely to this
activity, and 3 (4.7%) were involved in activities that meant temporary displacements to Puebla or surrounding towns. The remaining 27 household heads (51.5%) had the migratory destination of Los Angeles. Of these, only three regularly returned to San Miguel to harvest. The other 24 had permanent residency in the U.S. and returned only to their home town for religious festivities or under unusual circumstances. Age differences and access to land are key factors determining the migration destination. D'Aubeterre writes:

In sum, the most visible tendency is that in the most recently formed households, the emigration of the household heads is higher and preferably to the United States. These men have, on average, a lower number of cultivable parcels. In an inverse way, the heads of the units that have a longer course of development and a greater number of hectares tend to emigrate less, or in any event, migrate temporarily to Mexico City. But in these cases the proportion of migrants children that tend to go abroad is higher (1995:272, my translation).

The next section discusses the various waves of emigration, and explores the various characteristics of each type.

"...Because in that time there were contracts..." : The Bracero Program

The people went with contracts in those years. The United States was in war, and there were no people to work in the countryside. And when the war ended, they suspended this [program]. So then, many began to emigrate there, to the United States. This is why the people are emigrating there (Jaime, A-33, September 1994).

The first wave of San Migueleños that left for the north can be estimated as occurring under the terms of the Bracero Program (1942-1964). D'Aubeterre (1995) writes that in the mid 1940s, agents of the Ministry of the Interior began to recruit San Migueleños. The work was temporary, “it did not imply that these men’s connections with local agricultural work were severed; it was a temporary migration that did not alter fundamentally the traditional cycle of the domestic groups nor the sexual division of labour within them” (D'Aubeterre, 1995:269). Don Moisés says
Since here we work in the fields, I went each year for three, four months [...] for about four years. When we finished la labor in the fields, we would go there. And then for November, December, we would return to harvest. If you have children, you have the obligation to come back to harvest, so that they have their food. You go to work a little while, a few months, and you return for the harvest (A-30, September, 1994).

The first wave of migration, then, allowed for the maintenance of traditional strategies and provided an influx of cash resources.

*To Mexico City, "...peddling moronga"*15

Slightly before the Bracero Program was terminated by the U.S. government in 1964 and the closing of the borders to migrant workers, San Migueleños began finding work in the ranks of the informal economy in Mexico City as meat vendors, and to a lesser extent, as construction workers in Puebla. D'Aubeterre (1995) records the testimony of Don Julio:

There is no other work like this: it's a good job. When we went there we took other people who were also from here; it was a chain. The first that left was Saúl R. He met up with other friends that were from María [...] and they took him to Mexico. This man began to take his family, his friends, and the began to teach them to sell blood sausage. Later, one with another, we taught ourselves (1995:270, my translation)

When the Bracero Program ended and the borders closed, this type of migration became more popular and still exists as a popular livelihood in San Miguel.

The community’s relative proximity to these urban centres allows this type of migration to be coordinated with the agricultural cycle.

He said that he didn’t want to go [to the U.S.], ‘I am just going to work here, here in the fields and I will go to Mexico City when we are needing money, five days, eight days,’ he says [...]. He comes home for a weekend, two weeks, and he leaves. Right now we don’t have milpa, but when we had milpa, he never went. We work in the fields, I tell you. Right now since we don’t have any work, well he leaves [...]. They make sausage and there they sell it, rellena, pork sausage. And they go to peddle to the little villages, like here. They go knocking on doors [...] They are itinerant vendors (Doña Amanda, A-4, September 1994).

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15 Blood sausage
These workers spend 15 to 20 days involved in this type of work, residing in the houses of those who make the meat. The men exercising this type of migration strategy are often those elected to hold key posts in the Presidency, or the Ejido Commissariat, since their work involves short, periodic absences and thus the fulfillment of their positions. This type of migration is most prevalent among mature, married, men who have a greater number of (inherited) land parcels suitable for cultivation.

Don Esteban began selling meats in Mexico when he was 16. When he first married, he made several temporary trips to the United States, but returned to the Mexico circuit when his family had expanded. Now, even his trips to Mexico are less frequent, since his sons in Los Angeles support him. As this example shows, it is not uncommon for migration to both Mexico City and the U.S. to occur in the same household, with older men emigrating to Mexico City and their sons to the United States.

"Al Norte"

Right now there are just old men and aged women [in San Miguel]. All of the youth are fleeing because the fields don’t provide, they don’t produce. The land is not sufficient for sustaining a family. And because of this—going to the city does not pay enough to survive either—because of this, many go to work up there. For example, an emigrant that migrates to the United States earns the minimum that there is US$ 4.25. That’s like 13 000 [old] pesos per hour. For eight hours?! And they don’t earn that [here] (Don Moisés, A-30, September 1994).

In the late 1970s, San Migueleños began to leave their work in Mexico and go once again up through Tijuana to the fields of California as undocumented workers:

In September I was in Los Angeles, until December for the tomato harvest. And I came back here [...] to harvest what I planted [...] And that is when we constructed these houses [indicates his homes]. Here there were no houses. This is one of the first houses. And after, many people began to leave, in order to build their little houses (Don Bernardo, A-31, October 1994).

First I went over here, to a place near Cholula [What for?] To pick corn. Later I went to Mexico City, as an itinerant vendor. I did this for various years and in ‘75 I went to the United States ... I only went two or three
times for the grape harvest [...]. I left the corn field planted here, because the life of a peasant is very hard here. I left it planted [...]. I worked July, August, September, in order to come home in three months [...]. I went over as a wetback [...]. I went in '75, '76, '77, '78, '79. In '80 I never went anymore [...]. My children are there now. When I went there, I saved money to improve my life. This house is six metres long and five metres wide. (Don Esteban, A-42, February 1995).

This type of migration was seasonal, temporary work with definite aims: to cover unforeseen expenses; to cover the cost of the religious mayordomías; or to construct the family’s dwelling. As in the cases above, many men took part in this type of migration until they had established their own living arrangements away from their parents’ residence, after which they returned to the Mexico City circuit.

Although the first migrants of the mid 1970s worked in California as field labourers, by the mid 1980s, the majority had concentrated in the low-income neighbourhoods of Los Angeles where they became involved in the sale of fruit. Migrants on the bottom rung of this trade begin selling fruit out of grocery carts, wandering the neighbourhoods of Los Angeles and working to establish a clientele (Fig.4.9). If the new vendor is successful, he will be able to purchase a pick-up truck and have people working below him. One family, the inhabitants of the only two-story house in San Miguel, have even opened up a small supermarket in Los Angeles.

The supermarket example remains an anomaly; the majority of San Migueleños do not strike it rich in the North. They share accommodation with other Migueleños and have struggled to help each other out over the years: “We are like a chain. When someone comes, we help him cross, we help him find a place to live, we help him find a job. And then the next one comes, and it is the same” (Benjamín, A-34, September 1994). D’Aubeterre writes:

They became trained in the passage of the “bordo”\textsuperscript{16} and several times in the year returned to San Miguel with their dollars and their stories. Every time they would re-undertake their adventure, hauling with them some

\textsuperscript{16}A long stretch of desert, part of the illegal crossings from Tijuana to San Diego.
compadre, neighbour, brother-in-law. With time, and some with "mica chueca"\textsuperscript{17} or real ones in their possession, they left their fields and converting themselves in "angelinos"\textsuperscript{18}, they re-opened the dollar route for their countrymen. The first difficulties resolved, adolescent sons began to go, and just recently, young wives and single sisters (D’Aubeterre, 1995: 271, my translation).

The migrants live in the same general area of the city, where they have established a "transnational community" (Goldring, 1988): pooling remittances for public infrastructure in San Miguel, financing religious fiestas, and hosting twin fiestas in Los Angeles. Don Bernardo claims he has a list in L.A. of all the San Migueleños in the north: "All the people in Los Angeles, those from here that are there, we pool money for all the fiestas [...] we have a mass, we organize a dance, we make barbacoa" (A-31, September, 1994). Since the income generated by migrants barely covers their own subsistence needs (especially for those with dependents with them in the north), such cooperation is necessary to generate a margin of savings.

\textbf{Fig.4.9 A migrant worker selling produce on the streets of Los Angeles}

\textsuperscript{17} Literally, "crooked" visa and passport documents.

\textsuperscript{18} People from Los Angeles
Compared to other migration waves, current migration to L.A. has an indefinite character. Young men who are not involved in agricultural production form a significant portion of its flows (see Fig. 4.10). Migration has become an established stage in a young San Migueleño’s life:

today, for the young men, graduation from the tele-secondary is not only a rite of passage within the educational career; for the majority it represents entrance into adult life, of the assumption of much broader economic responsibilities, made possible by their youthful exit from the locality (D’Aubeterre 1995:275, my translation).

In fact, migration is at times not chosen, but an expected social responsibility which young men must assume. Their arrival home is uncertain, often occurring during the town’s fiestas: May 8 (the Appearance of Saint Michael) or September 29 (St. Michael’s Day). With them they bring video machines, televisions, ghetto blasters, and of course, their quebraditas—a distinguishable norteño (northern) dance step. These times of the year are a cause for alarm for parents; an increasing matrimonial trend that has emerged is el robo de la novia (the stealing of the girlfriend) whereby the young couple mutually agree to elope and shortly after leave for the North (D’Aubeterre, 1995).

Fig. 4.10 Migration Behaviour in San Miguel

![Migration Behaviour in San Miguel](image)

(Source: D’Aubeterre, 1995: 274)

Migration to L.A., however, also involves many San Migueleños who have already established their families in Acuxcomac. Migration is temporary, since most migrants
return home for good when they advance in years, but it is intense in character, with the migrant spending more time away from San Miguel than in the community and arriving home sometimes only once over a period of years:

Now he has changed a lot. Now he doesn’t come to stay, he comes to stay 25 days, a month, less. This time he has stayed a month but usually he doesn’t. Later on, later on, he goes. [...] What could he look for here? [...] Perhaps if there was somewhere for one to earn some centavitos [pennies] in order to support oneself; but without this, güera, what’s there to do?” (Doña María, A-5, March 1995).

This form of migration has resulted in a major reorganization of work and life within the domestic units of the migrants.

**Female Migration**

Now many young girls go to work in the city [...] They need to. And now there is enthusiasm for the girls to leave. And before, no one left, and neither did we get enthusiastic to go. [...] Before it rained more. Now it doesn’t rain. Because of this, it’s better that the girls leave to work. Now they don’t set themselves to making petate. And in those times, we only worked petate. [...] Why didn’t we leave to work in the city? We must have been stupid. [...] Hurry and make the petate, the petate, so many petates we sold. And not now. Now all the young girls [...] don’t want to work here. We gave them our permission and they left. It was a good thing. Or not? Now so many young girls are working in the city [...]. When we grew up, no one left to work. Now they go to different places, they know different jobs [...]. Some go to the United States (Liliana, A-1, October 1994).

Part of the phenomenon accompanying the monetarization of the Mexican countryside, in addition to male emigration, has been the proletarianization of young women as servants (Arizpe, 1989; Young, 1978). The temporary emigration of young women as domestics can be seen as a household strategy to diversify income-generating activities and have ‘one less mouth to feed.’ In San Miguel, the introduction of basic services and the improvement of dwellings has been accompanied by new patterns of consumption and new expenses: household appliances, community fees for the maintenance of public infrastructure, electricity and phone bills, medical service fees, et
cetera (D'Aubeterre, 1992). The money domestics make traditionally is handed over to their mothers, although in the families with a more secure socio-economic position the young women begin preparing for their own married life: “My daughter gives me money every two weeks. Sometimes she gives me N$ 100, and sometimes nothing because when she is buying ... because she already bought her stove, she bought her wardrobe [...] She bought her bed already, so she has her things” (Doña Lolita, A-10, September 1994).

The wages domestics earn are low, considering the hours they work. Although their low salaries “barely manage to compete with the earnings they would obtain via an intensive production of petates, the security of these earnings and their expenses of their room and board that are resolved through residence in the home of their bosses seem to add additional advantages to this strategy (1992:11, my translation). Employment as a domestic in Puebla or Mexico City is also one of the only “local” sources of work.

Here the women find work faster than men. Bonfilio went to work, and they didn’t pay him all of it. They owe him money [...] and they just don’t pay him. Because of this it’s better he drops it, better he goes to cut wood. Well it’s just because men don’t find work very well. If we don’t find work for Beatriz here [Puebla], I am going to send her to Mexico with a girl that we know, and later she can look for work. The other time she went, in May, she just went for 15 days, three weeks. They paid her N$ 650 (María, A-5, September 1994).

Furthermore, domestic work is often attractive to young women because it is an activity that allows them a measure of physical mobility. Those who work in Puebla are likely to come home for weekends to visit and help their mothers, while those in Mexico City have their weekends to spend as they wish.

The majority of young women leave for work after finishing secondary school, although some leave earlier. This period in a young woman’s life lasts until she is married, when she is expected to take up her position of daughter-in-law in the home of her husbands’ parents. Her new patrona (boss) is her mother-in-law, and the young bride is expected to take over responsibility of many of the most onerous, time-consuming
domestic chores. A new daughter-in-law is a blessing to a woman who has no daughters, married daughters, or daughters who have gone off to work. For many households, the exodus of young women to urban labour markets has meant a reorganization of household activity, and has placed a greater domestic responsibility upon their mothers. Doña Esperanza describes a young woman’s life 40 years ago:

How did you help your mother when you were a young girl? ...to put on the nixtamal, the beans, sweep the house, wash clothes [...] [And the young women now?] Well now, not anymore. Now they leave, they go to Puebla to work, some go to Mexico, some have already gone up north, yes but just lately in these times [...] I never went to Puebla, to Tepeaca. It was not long ago that I just began to go outside [the community] [...] I got married to my husband, and we lived here in our house, we raised our sons, our daughters [...] I always devoted myself to the fields (Doña Esperanza, A-2, October 1994).

Women are also beginning to make up the flows of migrants to the United States, most often as young wives but also as sisters or daughters:

There are many young women from here that are [in the U.S.], they go to work. Then they don’t have to be weaving petates here and earning little. They go there to work and earn a little more. And they go to learn of other things, to meet other people (Cecilia, A-21, March 1995).

Many women do not work outside their American residence but do the cooking and household chores for the migrants living there. Those who work outside this realm are employed in the informal economy (e.g. selling pirated audio cassettes); in factories (tortillas, textiles); or in domestic work and child care. Some many be involved in a variety of activities, like Cecilia, who worked the night shift at a tortilla factory and did domestic work by day for three years:

I could only do the night shift because my husband worked in the day [...] I had to look for night shift work so not to neglect the children. So he looked for work at nine in the morning and myself, at two in the morning. I woke up to leave the little girl’s bottle prepared because my husband left at nine [When did you sleep?] I didn’t. Because I had to look after the children, afterwards, do the household chores, clean the house, make the meal—I didn’t sleep. In those days we worked very hard in order to come here [to San Miguel]. I had two jobs. I left one, and I went home to make
the meal and wash the dishes and get my children and I went to the other
job. It was three hours. I left at one or two in the afternoon, and I came
back again to make dinner because my husband would come to eat. [...] I
went to the house of some old ladies. They paid me to wash the dishes,
clean the floor [...] The lady trusted me, so she said, “come and help me
and I will pay you. Bring your children.” [...] She paid me about five
dollars an hour. For three hours, it was about 15 dollars. And in the
tortillería I earned about 300 pesos for a week, and it was just five hours of
work (A-2, March 1995).

In the case of Maricela, she had both a brother and father working on a permanent basis in
Los Angeles. She arrived there when she was a single, 17 year old woman and sold
pirated audio cassettes in the local laundromat for a year. Both Maricela and Cecelia
valued their working experience, and the latter found paid work indispensable:

a woman also has to work because they are cases when people separate or
divorce and the woman has closed eyes, she doesn’t know where to work
or what a job is like, she doesn’t know anything. And if you know how to
work and get divorced, or if something happens--because things can
happen--you know how to look for work, where to go to find work, and
you are not scared (Cecilia, A-21, May 1995).

The situations of Maricela and Cecilia contrast with those of female migrants who are not
permitted to work outside of the home. In all cases, female migrants are operating in a
network that has essentially been established by men and one that is controlled by them:
“the motivations that underline [female] migration can place women in a situation that
deepens their dependency on others, subordinating them to complete tutelage exercised by
the those who monopolize the symbolic and material resources [...] in the new

4.3 EMIGRATION AND DAILY LIFE IN SAN MIGUEL

[How is San Miguel affected by emigration?] It is affected because one
abandons the family, abandons the town. One loses the culture. Secondly,
one goes to an unknown country and confronts another culture,
discrimination, drug-addiction, crime. There are many that don’t return
again (Jaime, A-33, September 1994).

Many youths go and break down there. They smoke marijuana, they inject
themselves [...] Because there they are free. They don’t have anyone to yell
at them. They don’t have any direction. For those who have direction there is no problem. They are earning money, they receive their cheque, and they are sending to their family (Esteban, A-32, October 1994).

Some--they say--get other wives there [...]. They abandon their wives that are here, some of them. They get other ones there. (Melissa, A-22, February 1995)

My young man. He likes drinking binges. Oh yes. He is the lost one, the jerk. He earns money, I know, but he doesn’t send it. That’s why I said to his father that [...] he will go and get him. Go and get him! Let him come and screw himself here, let him come and suffer. Let him come and work in the fields. Let him suffer what a peasant suffers. Let him come and kill himself in the heat, the wind, the water [...] Let him suffer here, with his daughter, with his wife (Doña Esperanza, A-2, March 1995).

Migration has without a doubt, transformed San Miguel. As the quotes above suggest, however, not all of the outcomes are not positive for all residents nor have equal impact in the lives of San Migueleños. A central transition has been the massive reorganization of household reproductive and productive strategies, which frequently entails an intensification of women’s work in order to maintain agricultural production, community cohesion, and family life. Individual circumstances differ according to such factors as the destination of the migrant, the life cycle of the domestic unit, or the dependency of the unit on cash remittances due to deficiencies of other resources.

Although young women are beginning to incorporate themselves in migration flows to international labour markets, in general, women figure predominantly as those who remain in San Miguel to tend to matters of family and community: migration is predominantly a male survival strategy. That is, it is a strategy women do not exercise nor control over and any benefits they receive are indirect. Whether through first hand experiences or by witnessing instances in the community, they are very aware that remittances are contingent on variables they have no control of: alcoholism, sickness, prostitution, co-habitation with another woman, etc. Some men have abandoned their families, ‘forgotten’ them for a period of years, or fallen extremely ill in the north. A few case examples are illustrative:
• "He doesn't send money regularly. He sends so little. He has his woman there. Here we do it all amongst ourselves" (Doña María, A-5, November 1994).

Don Bernardo has been working in Los Angeles for 20 years. In the mid 1980s, his visits home became less frequent: once a year, once every two years. He has five children still living at home, ranging from nine to 15 years old. He has another wife and child in L.A. and does not send remittances to Mexico. His wife María, 50, supports the family by farming and sending her children to work.

• "[My life] had improved but now it has become worse, imagine, if he doesn't send me money, how will I support the children, and with the milpa, it will be ready in two days. And think, if my husband has another woman there, what will he do to come back here? (Doña Benedicta, A-13, September 1994).

Doña Benedicta, 37, has five small children. Her husband has half a hectare of land. He spent almost three years in Los Angeles without returning to San Miguel. In the last year, he did not send any remittances. Three months after our interview, he arrived in San Miguel, ill with an alcohol-related disease, which caused the family to go into debt with a number of relatives.

• "It has been three years since he has been there. When he left, [his daughter] had not been born yet. [...] I had been pregnant for three months [...] and now my little girl is going to be two years old on the 12th of December ... She doesn't know him ... When a plane passes by, she yells "papa, papa" [waving at the plane]. Because she doesn't know her father. She recognizes his photograph (Raquel, A-23, October 1994).

Raquel got married by the civil registry to her husband three years ago. Several months later, he left to earn money so they could begin building their home. He has not sent remittances on a regular basis, and her daughter is frequently ill. Her brother-in-law recently phoned to tell her that her husband is an alcoholic. She claims to want to go to the north to get him.

Not all men abandon their families. Some men fall ill upon arrival or do not find work easily. Some regularly send remittances. However, "the thin separation between this type of emigration and the permanent absence of the migrant, places these homes in a virtual state of abandonment" (Arias and Mummert 1987:114, cited in D'Aubeterre, 1995). Whatever the particular case, all women diversify their survival strategies when their husbands migrate in search of work. The principal strategy, of course, is to ensure subsistence through agricultural activity. This and other complementary work will now be discussed.
4.3.2 Men’s Absences & Women’s Work
Income-generating and subsistence activities

They leave their lands to waste [...] like Don Bernardo. Doña María is the one who is planting. [...] For a woman it is a lot of work [...] There are many women like that, there is nothing they can do but work. Their men left, but here their children need corn [...] Because their husbands leave and they take up other women there, and they stay there [...] Sometimes they don’t send money. And they have other women there and the ones here are suffering. [...] They are not going to give money to their women here, there isn’t enough for two women (Amanda, A-4, October 1994).

In San Miguel, male absences have been accompanied by a full-scale incorporation of women in every stage of agricultural production: “a woman does the same kind of work as a man [...] If the man isn’t here, we [woman] work” (Doña María, A-5, September 1994). Doña María, a key participant in the research project is representative of women who have become completely in charge of production and management of the family’s land:

I have already started to catch up with the ejido. Right now we are beginning to take out the rocks. I already cleaned one parcel of stones that was very full of stones. It cost me N$ 500, for the peones. I took three señoritas, in three days we took out all the rocks. [...] I fed them, I gave them dinner and a soda pop. But now my land is clean. It doesn’t have any rocks (September 1994).

This further incorporation of women into agricultural production has entailed the execution of tasks exclusively considered “men’s work”, such as clearing and plowing.

Now since all the men go to Los Angeles, [men and women] do everything equally. They do the same. All the things women do are men’s work. There are almost no men here. They are all in Los Angeles. Now the women do everything [...] Everyone is shown how to work [...]. The agricultural tasks, women do them all (Paty, A-20, October 1994).

Plowing remains an exclusively male task, but women have proved they are physically capable of carrying it out:

Doña Maricela is the one that can drive the team of work animals. Three years ago she planted! With the team of work animals. She drove the team. [Why did she plant alone?] Because her husband wasn’t here. He
was in Los Angeles. He went to work and didn’t want to come to plant. So then he didn’t come, and she planted, her and her mother. She was with the team and we were planting the milpa. She can drive the team of oxen, but other señor as can’t (Raquel, A-23, April 1995).

However, due the existence of social and cultural gender constructions surrounding the division of labour, domestic units in which the male adults engage in long-term migration are more likely to use cash resources for some agricultural tasks, such as renting oxen and hiring a driver. Those without cash resources may sharecrop their land. Others rely on family and fictive kin to help them with these tasks, favours they will return with their own labour, weeding or harvesting.

Apart from subsistence production, women also engage in petty commerce to obtain additional money or goods, selling wild herbs, agricultural surplus (e.g. pumpkin seeds; beans) and/or firewood. Cutting firewood is very strenuous and poorly paid, and there are daily limits on the amount of wood that can be extracted. At the time of research, this activity was one single mother’s central livelihood although it barely provided for her small family. Some women also engage in waged agricultural labour within the community.

Craft production is still exercised by many women who make petates, although the art of chiquihuites (a male activity), has been largely abandoned. Petates are labour intensive, yet derive very little income. One petate takes two days to weave, not including the time it takes to collect and process the palm; in April 1995 San Migueleñas were selling petates to intermediaries for barely the equivalent of US $2 (N$ 9).

With the petate well, one earns nothing, I say. Only here we don’t buy the palm. But if we bought it, they say it is at 2,500 [old pesos] a bunch. To make a petate it’s two bunches. At two-fifty, then it’s five thousand for the palm. And then one’s time. Two days to weave a petate. Then one sells it, and there’s not enough to even buy soap. One doesn’t earn a thing. [...] We cut [palm] in one day. Then wait until it dries. This is why I say it’s a lot. A lot of your time and you... don’t earn enough to eat [...] The petate doesn’t help you in anything. (Doña Rosa, A-15, September, 1995).
Nonetheless, the manufacture of *petates* is one of San Migueleñas’s only ways to obtain income. When Doña Benedicta’s husband failed to send remittances for three years, the weaving of petates was an everyday activity for her that enabled her young family to get by. For other women, such as the young migrant Cecilia, the sale of petates provides her with the extra money to buy the disposable diapers her children became accustomed to when they lived in the U.S.

Livestock remains a subsistence strategy within more established households that have the additional labour for shepherding. It is preferable to craft production for the larger profits it generates. As noted, livestock production becomes particularly physically demanding in the dry season, when women must walk great distances to find pasture. Children’s involvement in shepherding when they relieve their mothers or grandmothers is estimated at an average of 22.2 hours weekly (Salcido, 1991). In times of household stress, when women have unforeseen tasks, must go to Puebla, or are ill, children will skip school and increase their participation in shepherding. At labour intensive points in the agricultural calendar, children are also heavily involved in fieldwork.

As the example of shepherding clearly highlights, children’s paid and unpaid labour has become a valuable resource. Most notable is the income of daughters working as domestics, which is often central to a household’s survival. D’Aubeterre (1995) claims that “in Acuexcomac, the certainty of [daughter’s] remittances and other contributions in kind permit the family unit to face the randomness of the sending of dollars, or to virtual paternal abandonment” (1995: 281, my translation). Daughters are obliged to give their entire salary to their mothers; their earnings are often more consistent than those of son’s:

Women, like how the young girls leave to work now, well they come once every week and they bring their pay. They don’t give all of it, because they take out what they need, but the rest they give. And men don’t. Men [...] give what they want to, and what they don’t want to, well... They spend money on their clothes that’s what they’re concerned with. They work, they buy their jacket, their pants, their underwear, they buy all of it. Shoes, hat, they buy all of it. According to their taste, this is not cheap! They buy
to their pleasure the best thing they like. And girls are acquiescent. They bring their pay [...] so that you buy the recaudo you need for the home. My sons are different. Because of this I say daughters are different; a woman gives more money than a man [...] Every week, every week [my daughter] comes with her money. And men, whenever they like (Doña Esperanza, A-2, April 1995).

Daughters also often come home on weekends to help ease their mothers’ domestic burden, washing clothes, ironing clean laundry.

**Community Maintenance**

[I]n the School Committee, there are just women [...] Women do everything [...]. They go to work with their shovel and their pick because their husbands are in the United States. Or if it concerns some business that they have to go to Puebla, the women go because the men aren’t here. [...] If it is concerning an assembly they are going to hold, well there are only women there, with their list and everything. There is the secretary, the president, the voters, all are there. Like today they held a meeting. Well they gave everyone summons, and my husband isn’t here. But since he wasn’t here, I went. So the agreements that we made, they will be sustained, even though we [women] were there (Doña Lolita, A-10, March 1995).

Accompanying a broader role in agricultural and income-generating activities, women have widened their presence in community life. Such community participation is quite diverse. Women have had to fill their husbands’ vacancy in the ronderas (communal work projects), such as the weekly sweeping of the plaza. Although many women delegate this work to their sons or father-in-laws, especially for the more physically demanding ones, some women do not have this option and do it themselves, taking up their “shovel and their pick”. For some activities, women who receive remittances can pay cash dues rather than work, but for those who don’t, they must deliver their payment in labour time: “with the [school] bathrooms, some paid. Some who don’t have any money went to do their task, to dig, to gather gravel. Some brought sand, seven cans of sand, seven cans of gravel. Others went to dig two metres of ditch” (Doña Rosa, A-15, March 1995).
In terms of town committees, many have become dominated by women, which was not the case in the past:

Before a woman didn’t even go over to the neighbour’s–now she goes to the meetings [...] of the school or of the tele-secondary, or of the commissariat or of the presidency–only women go to the meetings. And before what woman was seen in the meeting? Before, just señor es, not the women [...]. I don’t know why things changed. The men started to leave, the men left to work and in our husbands’ absence, we women went to the meetings [...]. Now the woman has to fulfill the responsibilities [...]. There are men working only in the auxiliares19, but in the school and the tele-secondary committees, there are just women (Doña Leona, April 1995).

The only positions that women have never held are the offices in the town presidency or the ejido commissariat. The present Ejido Commissariat claimed that woman cannot do these positions:

You will not see a single man in the Tele-Secondary Committee. There are ten that form the [...] committee. You will not see a man. Just women. So the people from the government come. Do you think that a woman who is not competent will be able to host someone from the government? That she will give a speech? That she will say frankly what is needed? What the school needs? No, she will not say this. Because as I told you awhile ago, they are not competent (February, 1995).

The involvement of women in community offices, however, has put male leadership in question. Some women argue their gender is more competent:

.. because a woman doesn’t drink, women--not a thing. They only dedicate themselves to [their post]. And the man who goes to an assembly? Well he has stayed in the store, with his beer, his mescal, drunk. And women don’t do this. It is not because men are lazy. But if they’ve made a deal, that tomorrow they are going to do something--harvest corn--then one says, ‘Let’s go have a beer’ and that’s it, they’re gone. They have one, and later they order another. Now they haven’t done what they were going to do. They’ve been caught up drinking. [...] [As well,] in any government office, they pay more attention to a woman than a man. The man arrives and they say ‘Come back tomorrow. Or come back in a week. Or come back here in two weeks.’ And with women that’s not the case. Women rapidly resolve the problems. I don’t know why they pay more attention to women

19 Presidency or Commissariat.
than men [...] I think that they respect women, they respect women more than men (Doña Lolita, A-10, March 1995).

Similarly, Doña Leona claims: "women are more responsible than men. Men go to the meetings [...] and they start drinking and that's it. Women don't do this. Women go to the meeting and come home to work in the house. To wash the clothes or bathe the children. Women never rest. During the week, in the fields" (A-11, April, 1995). Although women are socially prohibited from entering certain realms of male authority--the Presidency and the Commissariat--this may also be open to change. For example, women have exercised the post of police commander, although not formally assigned the position. In the case of Doña Rosa, when her husband was working in L.A. she was summoned to carry out his duties:

They only called me once in awhile: "Do you know what? It's your turn to lock up What's His Name". "Okay." I came to get the keys, and I went to lock up the offender [...]. Once it was my turn for the first time and I went [...]. They didn't explain to me why, they just called me with the order that they give to you when it is your turn to carry out this duty [...]. "You are going to lock up What's His Name." And on top of all of that, it was my compadrito (co-father)! I said, "I'm not locking him up." So they said to me "If you don't lock up your compadre, we will lock you up. Occupying your post, you do not see you compadre, you do not see your godfather, you do not see your brother, you do not see your family. You--lock him up! Put him in and lock the door." Someone else has to take him to the prison door. From the prison door, I had to put him in. I was trembling of fright, of fear. And yes, I locked him up (A-15, March, 1995).

Don Moisés claims, tongue in cheek, "There are no men here [in San Miguel]. Here just women will remain, and you will not see a single man. The President, a señora. The Secretary, a señora. The Police, also a señora. Just señoritas. Now because all the men are there [in the U.S.]" (A-30, September, 1994). Doña Leona, president of La Mujer Campesina argues that because her daughter’s generation have more education will make a difference:

I believe that a woman always excels more than a man. For example, the man [who is] the president. They bring him a carton of beer, and there he is drinking. And he is the president. And a woman doesn't. I think that
with time it can be a woman. Of course she’ll know how to read, she’ll know how to defend [agrarian/political rights]. Like us, we only studied primary, third grade, there was no more. Because of this we only know how to read a little bit. But us in the group? They give us courses in the Colegio [de Postgraduados]. They say we should not be embarrassed, to read. Even though just a little, we are gaining. Us women will always be responsible (A-11, April, 1995).

Gender relations have undergone alterations as women have broadened their participation in public life in San Miguel and their access to positions of authority:

Here, women are working in the majority of the posts. Almost all the men go out to work, and they aren’t here, so you do it. And they pay attention to you. Not like before, forcibly: men. And if the man doesn’t go, the work is not valid. Now they agree that a woman is valid. And we do it (Doña Rosa, A-15, March 1995).

Although women have entered formerly male-dominated spaces and this has accrued benefits in how women are perceived in San Miguel and how they perceive themselves, the extra burden on women’s time and energy cannot be underestimated. As household heads, women must accept the responsibilities: “If they don’t have time but it’s their turn to be in a committee, they have to have time” (Doña Leona, A-11, April 1995). Doña María claims:

Right now I am in the Solidarity [committee], and I don’t want to be. Now I’ll leave when they change the Solidarity [committee] and they will put us in another position. Another position, as if he were here. They’ll put us in the Committee of the Tele-high school, I’ve already done the Committee of the Primary School, I just finished that three years ago (A-5, April, 1995).

Doña Rosa argues that a woman could simply not hold the position of President or Commissariat due to her domestic burden: “Imagine. A man, he just finishes his breakfast and he goes to the presidency. And a woman, with her chores, imagine! To be in the presidency, and with children! Who cooks for her? Who washes her clothes? Because to spend everyday in the Presidency, in order to make tortillas, to cook, to wash clothes, if she goes to the presidency, she doesn’t do her chores” (A-15, March 1995). This is

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20 Rural fieldworkers from this institute are involved in Grupo La Mujer Campesina (Peasant Women’s Group).
similar to Gonzalez de la Rocha’s (1989) research of “female empowerment” among immigrant wives; the transfer of authority is often something women are forced to assume and something they are not happy with (cited in Salgado, 1993).

In addition to the fulfillment of public offices (cargos), women also devote time and energy to maintaining social relationships with family and the community in their husbands’ absence. Examples of women’s contributions to the social fabric of the community and in maintaining affective relations within the household are numerous. This is an area deserving of further commentary, debate, and research. However, for brevity considerations, just a few examples are offered here.

In San Miguel, social relationships are particularly recognized around the numerous religious holidays which are strictly celebrated within the community. On these days, most women prepare a special meal (which often involves the purchase or slaughtering of an animal and the purchase of expensive ingredients) to be offered as a gift in household visits. For example, during Todos Santos (All Saint’s) week, women load baskets with special dishes, home-made bread, fruit, and soda-pop and go to visit their compadres. A relatively new tradition is to exchange low-cost gifts such as plastic fashion jewelry or cloth handkerchiefs.

In the various compromisos (social commitments) associated with the religious calendar, women have always played a major role in the fulfillment of the cargos of the mayordomos. Traditionally when a family agrees to fulfill a cargo, women have been responsible for cleaning the church, taking care of the clothing and condition of the saints, organizing work-teams of dozens of women to make the meals, etc. However, in the absences of their husbands and other male children, women have continued to fulfill their traditional roles and those of their husbands. Men’s participation is now often restricted to providing the necessary monetary resources. It is not uncommon for a woman to fulfill a cargo for three years, and have her husband arrive days before the fiesta and leave shortly
after it finishes. Even in cases where men have ceased to monetarily support their families, women fulfill the cargos with or without their husband’s monetary and social contribution.

Fig.4.11 A procession for Saint Michael Archangel

4.3.3 Men’s Absences & Women’s Health

Where did this disease, diabetes, come from? I don’t know. Some say it comes from susto [fright], others say it comes from gusto [pleasure]. Others say it comes from rage.21 Who knows. Here many people have it. My comadre Marfa. She hasn’t been well for some time. She was fat, fat. But from the day she began to know that her husband has another woman in Los Angeles ... It can happen to anyone. When you are responsible for many children, and your husband doesn’t send money, or anything. Well I think that it is natural that this made her angry (Doña Lolita, A-10, March 1995).

The intensification of women’s efforts in household subsistence has had enormous costs for their health. Women’s capacity to maintain the balancing act of subsistence production, engaging in income-generating activities, compensating for male absences in

21Rage, in Spanish: coraje. See Behar (1993) for a discussion on coraje and its capabilities to provoke sickness.
community life, and meeting the general needs of day to day existence is not infinitely elastic (Elson, 1992). The woman mentioned above became ill with diabetes, a disease she and others accrue to her “coraje”--the rage upon finding out why her husband was not sending his remittances. The following passage reflects the daily stress she is under trying to make end meets for her extended family, composed of her four unmarried children between the ages of 9 -17, her older married daughter, her baby grand-daughter, and her mother-in-law:

Right now, even though I don’t work [for a wage], I have food to eat, I have corn, I have wheat. [...] But here when there are pedidos (community expenses) where can we take money from? There are so many pedidos here. They ask for money for this and money for that, oh Maria Purísima! Like now, we haven’t paid everything. I still owe for the Health Centre, I still haven’t given. $N 10. For the library that is going to come, $N 25. Now the 8th of May is coming again, let’s see what they are going to charge us with the contribution. Look, how much it is! Now, to dress the children that are going to go the dance festivals. And now I don’t have any money. [The custom is that the man is the one that supports the home.] But he just doesn’t send me any money, what is he good for? Like now, let’s see, he doesn’t send me anything, now with what do I get by? [...] Well, for food, we don’t have a lot, but if only some beans, some chile. But for the rest? With money from where? And now you see how everything has gone up? Everything is expensive. The bottle of oil, eight pesos. And where are we going to earn those eight? Here we don’t have something to work in. How much is a petate. They say that now they are worth 9 [pesos], I think. When we charge, it is 4 pesos, 4.50. If we make one in a day, or we make one weaving alone. Between two, but tomorrow you return your work, and its the same, güera. We are screwed, we don’t have anywhere to look for work here. (Doña María, A-5 March 1995)

Similarly, Doña Esperanza, 56, complains of the stress she is coping with since her son has abandoned the family, which includes his wife and baby daughter:

The doctor says I have gastritis and other sicknesses, that it’s more complicated. I have coraje, I am sad, and I have a bad heart [...]. The coraje hurt me [...]. I’m in the fields, and a thought occurs to me, and I start to cry [...]. My son, well he gives me coraje also. Now he has a wife. He makes me sad, he makes me mad. But now he called me, and my heart

22She quotes half of nine pesos, because she is referring to matlanes, petates that are woven between two people. N$4.50 is the equivalent of approximately US$ .75, what a woman earns per petate.
recovered. I was sick. He said: 'I am going to send you money' he says, 'so you are cured. You are going to get better, I am going to send you a little money'. He sent me a little, although not much. But I want him to come, this is what I'm saying, that he comes home [...]. I always tell him I am happy, but I'm not happy. I tell you, [...] I fell sick. Not to the death, not that I don't get up, I am not bed-ridden. I walk, I work. But I am not happy [...] This is how I feel. My body hurts, I am not happy. At times I don't sleep. I go to sleep at eight and then I am up at one, at two o'clock in the morning. And then I don't sleep anymore. And then a thought comes, and I am thinking, thinking, thinking. And then I don't sleep (A-2, October, 1993)

These worries, combined with women's extra physical expenditures as they have intensified their activities in other areas, have placed added stress on their bodies. In San Miguel a common saying is women "wear out"--age--faster than men: "la mujer se acaba más rápido que el hombre." Salgado's study (1993) on wives of immigrants noted an unusually high stress rating among her research sample concerning the increased obligations and responsibilities they were forced to assume. Loneliness and isolation also added to their stress (Salgado, 1993).

4.4 CRISIS? WHICH ONE? RECENT RESPONSES TO THE NEW DEBT CRISIS

The 1994 devaluation, as the crises that have gone before it, had its impact with San Miguel, leaving peasants frustrated:

Everything went up in price. But for us, the peasants [...] things have not risen in price. But why should we buy, if they put the prices up on us? For ourselves, right now the beans yielded a bit. My husband says "We will go to sell a little, a sack. We will go to Puebla, we will select some in order to take our sample and get the prices. In order to help us out a little." [...] We took three kilos of each bean, of colour and the other. They are paying two thousand [old] pesos for a kilo of beans. And I had been buying some at 4,500 a kilo! So why would we sell for two pesos, can you imagine! Do you think the peasant doesn't get angry? And here we pay peones. We pay for peones [...] It costs a lot, I tell you, to farm. But I tell you, it is fair that if they raise the prices there, they pay us a little more too. This is what makes a person raise objections. They raise the prices of everything, except for the peasant's [product]. The tortilla? The tortilla went up. But corn did not go up, corn costs the same. So why should we sell? (Doña Lolita, A-10, March 1995).
Since it does not pay to sell the little surplus some families enjoy, the only significant access to consumer goods is waged labour. The December crisis therefore hit San Migueleños differentially, according to their income source. Households reliant on salaries paid in pesos, such as those of the informal meat vendors, domestics, or construction workers saw their money cut in half with surging inflation. The following woman, whose husband and four children work in Mexico City complained:

All the prices have risen, more than enough [...]. Right now we change N$ 50, it’s as if we were changing N$ 5. And now the money doesn’t last us for anything, not a thing. I say to my husband, ‘I don’t know what we’re going to live off.’ We go to buy a bag of soap, and it is so expensive. Up until the 15th, gas cost N$ 18. Now it costs N$ 24 [...]. Now everything is expensive, Karol. When will it end? ‘Oh my God,’ I say to my husband, ‘everything is expensive.’ I think this is why sometimes people start assaulting. They don’t want to work because now when they work their wages don’t cover everything. The situation is very tough. The peso is worth eight to the dollar (Doña Lolita, A-10, March 1995).

For those receiving American dollars, the crisis was just another crisis. Don Esteban explains how the differences were felt:

I survive because I have an economic position that .... well I have corn, I have beans, I am not worried at all. I have my sons in the north. For me, I don’t feel the crisis. But there are people that don’t depend on anyone, and these are the ones that die. They are the defenseless ones. They do not have support, they do not have help. They do not have economic support [...]. I don’t have this problem. But there are people that have this kind of problem. They have two, three children in the north but they never send money [...]. And my children are not like this. They send me one thousand dollars, they always send to me once a month, once every two months (A-32, February 1995).

Workers in Mexico City, some of whom argued that peddling meats could be just as profitable as working in the United States began to doubt their assertions. One participant claimed her sons were no longer content to remain working in Mexico City:

It’s not the same as over there [U.S.]. There they earn more. Or the money there is worth more. There I don’t believe it’s worth anything, but here it is. They say that the dollar is worth five or six [pesos] [...]. The
dollar is becoming valuable, but here things went up. Everything is costly. It is very expensive (Doña Liliana, A-1, February, 1995).

Migrant meat vendors in Mexico City also complained that sales had decreased as their clients felt the crisis.

American dollars have become more attractive at the same time anti-immigrant tensions in the United States are at an all time high and are being used for political advantage. For example, California Governor Pete Wilson’s re-election campaign in 1993 centred on Proposal 187, a bill which denies health and educational services to the children of undocumented immigrants. Although discriminatory bills such as this are tied up in the courts and being overturned, the stakes at the border have gone up. Before:

...it was very cheap. It cost just three hundred [U.S.] dollars for both of us. But not now. Now they pay around five hundred for one person. It is very expensive [...] It is more dangerous. Sometimes when they are caught, La Migra grabs the coyotes, they lock them up.23 I believe they even beat them. And the people, too. Because of this, they are risking it, and even paying a lot (Cecilia, A-21, March 1995).

Both state and federal governments have tightened control on their borders to the point that in January 1996 they were militarized. Specifically, 17 military posts were installed on the highways leading to Los Angeles (“La vigilancia militar, contra el narco: SIN,” La Jornada, 19 January 1996, pg.60). In the first two days Project Storm went into affect on the Arizona-Sonora border, a federal measure to buttress Operation Safeguard in Arizona and Guardian in California, over 3,284 illegal immigrants were detained by the Border Patrol. Newspapers claimed that coyotes were charging up to a thousand U.S. dollars (“EU: Obtienen polleros 5 mil mdd al año,” La Jornada, 16 April 1996, pg.1).

Raising the stakes on migration has definite gender implications. Firstly, it makes female migration more difficult. The obstacles women have always faced on crossing the border (male violence; the risks and burdens of taking children) have intensified under the current situation. Benjamín, a young migrant, prefers his wife stays in San Miguel:

23 ‘La Migra’ refers to American immigration officials. ‘Coyotes’ or ‘polleros’ (literally, chicken farmers) are paid guides for illegal (Mexican) immigrants crossing the U.S. border.
I have asked myself this, I have thought about it: leave her, bring her—but it would put me in danger to bring her [...]. I don't want her to run risks. I want to leave her, under the protection of my parents, her parents. So that my wife will be well (A-34, September, 1995).

Furthermore, as costs rise, both in terms of coyote fees and in personal safety, it is probable migrants' stays will become more extended and their debts accrued in crossing will take longer to pay.

In San Miguel, those families who are not receiving American dollars on a regular basis are making changes at the most basic levels:

Cooking oil, can you imagine? Sometimes I tell my children it's better that we don't eat fried food. Now it is at [N$] 7.50 [pesos] the litre [...] They say in April it will go up even more. Because of this, I tell my children: now we are not going to eat fried food, but everything boiled. They say, 'But mom, it has no flavour' (Doña Rosa, A-15, March 1995)

By December 1995, the cost of a bottle of oil had risen to N$ 10.50, from N$ 3.50, just a year after the peso adjustments in 1994. Although their agricultural production is not linked as tightly to the market as those of commercial producers, San Migueleños are still tied to consumer goods markets and labour markets, all of which have undergone significant changes which echo down to the household level. Because the prices of goods have risen much more than wages, those households without dollar remittances are the ones that suffer most.

4.5 **GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS (1988-1994) IN SAN MIGUEL**

Considering the current state of the Mexican economy, it is likely that the exodus of young men and women from rural areas in Puebla will continue, as occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s when the economy contracted and poverty in the countryside grew. As pointed out in Chapter 2, government policies have largely neglected, and often punished, small subsistence-based producers. Now the government has formally announced the abandonment of basic grains producers and introduced a number of 'welfare' policies which claim to ease the transition.
Specific government programs to improve the standard of living in San Miguel by means of incentives to production have been largely insignificant throughout the 20th century. An elderly San Migueleño, speaking about lack of state support claimed "like the old saying goes, we were forgotten" (Don Moisés, A-30, September 1994). Direct programs have been largely restricted to intermittent forms of extension (soil conservation, livestock improvement) provided by field workers with the Colegio de Postgraduados, or erratic production supports (discounted prices for fertilizer, temporary credit) through the rural development bank, BANRURAL.²⁴ In general, public investment has been minimal, failing to generate complementary resources that could enhance or diversify production. Furthermore, producers' relationship with these institutions has been wrought with corruption on behalf of the agricultural bureaucracy. On one occasion, the bank representative assigned to San Miguel defrauded producers, and in another occasion, an insurance agent had been involved with false recognition of crop failures (Rámirez, 1994).

Recent government programs in San Miguel will not change the government's spotty record in the community. Macro-economic policy that suggests grain producers abandon 'inefficient' corn production for more advantageous crops is absurd. Without irrigation, no crop can compare with corn in its adaptability to the environments found in the rain-fed, mountainous lands of the Tentzo. In the current climate, San Migueleños who rely on the lands for subsistence will most likely continue to produce as they have since the 1920s and participate in the dollar route to Los Angeles, despite tougher immigration policies. This section examines how the programs discussed in the introductory chapters of the thesis have been manifested in San Miguel Acuexcomac, focusing on the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program, PRONASOL), Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo (Program for Direct Support to the Countryside, PROCAMPO), the reformed Article 27, and the one government-funded

²⁴The Puebla regional branch of the Colegio de Postgraduados is called Centro de Enseñanza, Investigación, y Capacitación para el Desarrollo Agrícola Regional (Centre of Education, Research, and Training for Regional Agricultural Development, CEICADAR).
program aimed specifically at women, *Grupo La Mujer Campesina* (Peasant Women's Group).

### 4.5.1 PRONASOL: “Crédito a la Palabra”

Since its inception with the Salinas administration, San Migueleños have applied twice for PRONASOL. In August of 1993, 29 *ejidatarios* received N$ 67,550, which they put towards the purchase of a tractor (N$79,000). Since they achieved repayment, they were planning on buying another tractor in December 1994, plans which were delayed due to the increase in prices following the devaluation. The same model, in March 1995, had risen to over N$140,000.

Although the case of San Miguel’s group of beneficiaries appears as a shining example of the benefits of PRONASOL, the process to secure the funds indicates that corporatism in the agricultural bureaucracy is far from being a thing of the past. The *Ejido* Commissariat relates his experience:

In February I handed in the list. I was asking about it February, March, April, May, June, in a row, and nothing. Then I was more persistent in July. The entire month of July I was in the office of Solidaridad, PRONASOL. Like that, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Monday, Wednesday, Friday [...] We went to the *Central Campesino Independiente*, the CCI, and they gave me a hand. The last person that went with me was the General Secretary of the *Central* [...]. He is a federal deputy. And by August 5, last year, is when they gave me the money to buy the tractor [...]. The government gives assistance, help, but only if you are always asking and asking and asking, until they get tired. The government representatives say, ‘Let’s give him this because he’s starting to bother us.’ Economically, you are losing out. If I was working in Mexico, I would bring, well, some good money for my family, in order to satisfy their needs. But now, the everyday needs [are met] with what our sons send us (*Ejido* Commissariat, October 1994).

The *Ejido* Commissariat at the time spent a lot of his personal time in the project, although he did not receive a cash compensation. Petitioning for the money was difficult, as was later collecting it when it was due from the members in the credit group:
I had invested a lot of time, like a fool, out of stupidity. Now, in order to recover the money for December? We were at it for a week, my treasurer helped me. A week we visited everyone that I had given money to. A week, house to house [...] I collected the money and two people were left owing. And for these two people, I went and took out money from my son’s accounts, and I borrowed it to them, in order to complete the bill. And later they paid me, but when they did, they gave me 100 [pesos], they gave 50 [pesos], like so. And this money I spent (February 1995)

Although PRONASOL was difficult to acquire (the help of a PRI strongman), and demanded a serious commitment on behalf of the Commissariat to recover the money and thus maintain San Miguel’s eligibility for further credit, it is the only route of credit available for these producers. Under the new rules as set down by the ‘modernization’ of the countryside, San Miguel has been designated a zone of low productive potential and thus only eligible for PRONASOL resources (Ramírez, 1994). San Miguel’s category also makes it exempt from official initiatives to stimulate production. One of these is the Programa para Maíz de Alta Producción (Program for High Production Corn, PROMAP). PROMAP is a program created in 1990 to target low-income corn producers in areas with ‘productive potential,’ offering a support package that combines both subsidies and technical assistance. Another support for which San Miguel is ineligible is that of BANRURAL, since producers do not have a favourable credit rating with this institution. In San Miguel, a conflict was generated by the BANRURAL field inspector (Rámirez, 1994). He did not deposit the payment of credit that the producers had made, and thus the bank charged credit from the producers. The producers decided to no longer work with the bank and not pay the debt they owned. This ejido is excluded, under current agricultural policy, to receive further credit.

PRONASOL is thus the only channel open for Migueleños to access federal funds destined for the agricultural sector. However, it must be petitioned for as a group. Perhaps PRONASOL is beneficial for communities seeking support for specific projects, but in the countryside it does not act as a reliable, opportune form of credit, especially in those communities where producers’ dedication to the fields is fluid and dependent on a
variety of factors such as the availability of labour and monetary resources. PRONASOL in San Miguel comes as a contradiction to current government rhetoric that emphasizes the individual responsibility of each producer, acting as a welfare payment rather than a significant subsidy to production.

4.5.2 PROCAMPO

Like PRONASOL, the Commissariat went to a tremendous effort to form the list of eligible producers for PROCAMPO. For the wheat production of 1995, the ejidatarios did not collect PROCAMPO because he broke his ankle and no one else came forth to get the job done:

Right now I have to hand in the list for the wheat, because all the private properties are planted in wheat. The list has to be handed into the Ministry of Agriculture in order to make an application for PROCAMPO for Fall-Winter. But I can’t go, with this cast [...] The people say that I never did anything and the government just handed over the money to them. Here the people are incredible, very ignorant [...] They say, ‘the government is giving away money. Even though the Commissariat doesn’t go, they will give us money’ (February 1995).

PROCAMPO funds were first distributed in San Miguel in August of 1994. Not all ejidatarios made the list; some simply failed to do so, others abstained, distrustful of “free” government funds. However, these payments, as outlined in Chapter 2, are insufficient. As Don Moisés comments: “Well, it’s a little help. They don’t give you a lot for a hectare. I think that it would be a good idea if they gave, for example, a thousand [pesos] for each hectare, that they would change it. Because it is not sufficient for all the tasks one has to do. At least a thousand pesos” (A-30, September, 1994). Many of the people interviewed claimed that rather than being used for productive investments, the PROCAMPO cheque was used for various necessities, such as community commitments. One informant claimed PROCAMPO money is used “for something that’s needed. Notice that the fiesta just passed, and we spent it. In order to shop, because people come over to eat. So it’s for something that requires money” (Doña Liliana, A-1, October 1994). The
reasons why people are using PROCAMPO for something other than productive investments are no doubt diverse; however, this may also mean PROCAMPO is an untimely form of credit.

4.5.3 PROCEDE & the new agrarian law

In San Miguel, the PROCEDE land regularization was in its closing stages in June 1995. The reformed Article 27 holds important changes for the ejido's legal structure. Firstly, the PROCEDE process will legalize the numerous informal land grants the original ejidatarios split amongst their children, providing a degree of security for later generation ejidatarios. Secondly, when PROCEDE is finished, San Migueleños will be one step closer to transforming their ejido into private property.

At the end of the PROCEDE process, 41 more ejidatarios than those listed in 1991 were given land certificates, bringing the total number of San Miguel's ejidatarios to 198. 34 male and seven female ejidatarios were added to the original list. Ejidatarios' social land holdings were finally certified on documents fitted in bright, glossy folders, handed out on April 26, 1996 by the state governor Manuel Bartlett who arrived in helicopter. Months prior, technicians from the government statistical office came out to professionally measure ejido parcels and take aerial photographs. The certificates made legal ejido land holdings that, prior to PROCEDE, were recognized by community members but not by state files. Unfortunately, not all of the informal rights were recognized by PROCEDE. One woman, for example, inherited a lot in the urban parcel. The day her husband and her were going to have the land transferred to her name in 1959, she went into labour. Her husband went anyway, and had the land put in his name. During the PROCEDE process, she wanted the wrong to be righted, and the certificate to bear her name. This did not happen. Although she doubts her husband would transfer the land without her consent, she had the following comments:

He says that he wants to sell, that now he has the right to sell. And I say he doesn’t, while I’m still alive. It says that he is the owner but I know it is
my land. This piece of land is my father’s, he left it to me. [...] Everyone knows it is mine [...] If I die, I will leave it to my daughters, to my sons. Are the authorities going to come and give orders in my house? “This is no longer yours, it’s your husband’s?” It is both of ours. We both work it. [...] [How did you feel when you saw the certificates in your husband’s name?] Well, I felt sort of out of control [...] As I have told you, I don’t have anyone to talk to. Who am I going to talk to? I felt sad, but I don’t think he would be so cruel to sell. And his children? Where will they live? We built these houses between him and I. As if he is going to leave them with someone else! (Doña Esperanza, A-2, April 1996).

It is unlikely in the short term that a land market will develop in San Miguel. The land is of such poor quality, it is doubtful that investors from outside the community would be interested in San Miguel’s farm lands. Even many San Migueleños are not interested in expanding their land base:

In reality, field work is very tiring and production is low. We are not interested in buying land because it doesn’t produce, because it doesn’t return the money that one invests [...] With these lands, because they are dry lands, well they don’t give you a return on your money. If there is a good rainy season, they produce. And when there isn’t, all your work is lost. You do your plowing, planting, tasks, and finally, everything dries because it doesn’t rain. Well all is lost. And here, the government does not give any support (Don Moisés, A-30, September 1994).

These remarks by this aging ejidatario are shared by many of the younger migrants in Los Angeles who have abandoned farming. They see little gain from being campesinos, considering the current state of affairs:

My husband doesn’t like to farm. He prefers to go to work than to cultivate land. His father says, ‘Stay and plant. Stay here’. My father-in-law has land but my husband doesn’t want to farm (Cecilia, A-21) May 1995).

Well the [men] that are here, sure, they plant. But the ones that went to the United States don’t want to anymore. They don’t like it anymore. Now they don’t want to work with the yoke (Raquel, A-23, April 1995).

The work [in Los Angeles] is different. I come here but we don’t do anything [...]. I work a lot in the fields ... but it’s very hard work [...]. Walking that far [pointing to ejido lands] tires me out. I come back very tired, my feet hurt. And imagine, all day long. There the work is in a car.
One gets tired from driving, but it’s different (Don Bernardo, A-31, October 1994).

The migrants see no value in farming if it doesn’t not yield revenues. Benjamín, a 21 year old migrant with 6 years of experience in L.A. explains

I like it here, I do like it. But I don’t like working the land. [Adds quickly:] Yes, I like it, but [...] I would like someone to work it for me. Myself as administrator of the harvest, this is what I’m thinking too. I wouldn’t work the land, I would pay someone to work it [Why?] I find it really tiring, really tough. [...] If it was irrigated, you’d know that you could be sure of your harvest, because you wouldn’t have to worry about water, you wouldn’t have to worry about anything. Only your attention, if you neglected the land. But not anything else. And like it is right now? You’re waiting until it rains. And if it rains, how sweet. Great. And if it doesn’t, how many months did you lose working, how many months? How much money did you lose, investing it in the land? You lost so much with no gains [...]. This is why I’m not excited, why I don’t want to get involved in it. But if there was irrigation, I think I would, because I would harvest my crop, and I would be sure that I would profit from my harvest and I would go and sell it and come back with money. Like one does with a business, just like that. But not how it is right now (Benjamín, A-34, October 1994).

Changing views towards the land have also altered inheritance patterns. Traditionally, the bulk of the land, the house, the solar, and the animals went to the xocoyote—the youngest son. Today, “times have changed. Sometimes the youngest ones leave and don’t return, perhaps the second or third child returns. And the land stays with that one” (Don Moisés, A-30, September, 1994).

Despite the fact that many young men no longer want to work the land, a market may not open up due to the ejido’s deep symbolic and cultural significance. The migrant quoted above claimed he would never sell his fathers’ lands:

My reasons are that it is something that my father cared for, it is something from which my father raised us, from which he fed us, and it is something I would never sell. It would be for me something bad ... how can I say this ... it is a land that gave me life, and because of this I would not sell it (Benjamín, A-34, October 1994).

In San Miguel: “no one sells [land]. Everyone wants it for themselves. There are a lot of lands that are not worked, but they aren’t sold. They don’t sell them nor do they let others
take them up. There is a lot of land that isn’t worked” (Doña Rosa, A-15, October 1993). Furthermore, family members have been murdered over inheritance issues.

As noted throughout this chapter, land is still extensively farmed in San Miguel not only in those domestic units where the father works in Mexico City in order to attend to the fields, but also in those families where the father works in Los Angeles and the family parcel becomes an important safety net. Milpa agriculture constitutes a rich and complex agro-ecological system that goes beyond corn consumption:

Peasant families value their cornfields highly because they obtain many useful consumption goods from them -- the majority of which have no wider market and therefore no monetary value. When the peasants produce corn, they supply themselves with grain that is superior to that available in the local market. The damaged ears and corncobs feed their pigs and poultry [...] Squashes, various types of beans, dry peas and chiles are grown there, along with a wide variety of other plants used as food, medicine, forage, and for traditional rituals [...] the sub-products of the milpa, some to a greater and some to a lesser extent, play a fundamental role in the peasant economy, providing an important dietary complement and thus reducing monetary outlays for animal and human consumption. (Garcia and Garcia, 1994:110).

For women and other family members who cannot rely on remittances, the land has a completely different meaning. An example is useful.

The reformed Article 27, as outlined in Chapter 2, individualizes ejido rights in the ejidatario as a single property holder whereas in the former legislation treats the ejido plot as a family patrimony. It is interesting to note the quote on page by Don Bernardo who complains of field work (his feet hurt after walking to ejido, etc.). Don Bernardo’s wife, however, now does all the tasks he formerly carried out in addition to her own. For her, ejido rights include farming an agricultural plot for subsistence needs, using communal pasture land for livestock, and exploiting communal forest land for firewood, marketable wild goods, and palm for petates. These strategies are employed in the virtual absence of remittances that has been the family’s reality for the last three years, since Don Bernardo’s
income now goes to his second, American family. As this case highlights, he attaches different importance to the land than his wife.

Should Don Bernardo decide to sell his land, his wife and their children only have "derecho del tanto"—they have the right to be the first buyers—but they must realize their purchase within 30 days. The new law, however, has an article that Doña María could take advantage of. Article 48 allows women to claim the title to the land when their husbands (the ejidatarios) emigrate and are away from their parcel for more than five years. The effectiveness of this legislation is only real, however, if women are aware of their rights, and secondly, if they forego patrilineal cultural patterns and make their case.

Doña María, Don Bernardo’s wife, has lived in a state of virtual abandonment for almost ten years. When he paid one of his periodical visits (first time in two years) she treated him with respect, as a guest of honour. Doña Alba, her comadre, explains: “What is she going to do? It is his house. Where is she going to run with her children? When he is old, surely that woman [in L.A.] will not take care of him. He will come back here. It is his house” (A-3, September, 1994). By now the ejido parcel, which she has single-handedly farmed for the last ten years, is informally considered her property by both her and her husband. When PROCEDE began, she spoke to her husband by phone who agreed to have the papers put in her name. She made several expensive trips to Puebla to arrange her papers. When she presented her case to the Ejido Commissariat, he refused.

[Why aren’t the land certificates in your name?] Because my Chipil didn’t want to put my name down. My Chipil was Commissariat then, my godchild Esteban. He said, ‘No, godmother. How can you be the ejidatario while my godfather is still alive?’ [...] My godchild just didn’t want to put them in my name. But that man confirmed that it doesn’t matter if they are in [my husband’s] name, because he doesn’t manage them, I manage them, it doesn’t matter. He might have the papers, but I’m the ejidatario [...]. I told them, there [in the Presidency] to put my name, and I even went to get my birth certificate form, my special form for my civil marriage, which is what they ask us for. And I just went to get them,

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25 An affectionate term “chipil” means “spoiled brat.” She is using it to refer to a 45 year old male.
26 An employee of the Agrarian Attorney General’s Office
spending money out of craziness, because afterward he didn’t want to [put my name down] anymore.

Another interesting example is that of Doña Beatriz. She has two daughters in San Miguel, both of which have cared for her since she became ill. One of them was living with her two children and husband in L.A., but returned to care for her mother. However, Doña Beatriz’s only son, also a migrant, has not been in San Miguel for several years nor sent remittances. However, when it was time for this ejidataria to name her successors under PROCEDE, after consulting with her uncles, she named her son, rather than her daughters, who were frustrated with her decision.

4.5.4 On-going Projects Directed at Women

In the ejido of San Miguel, women were never granted a UAIM--a unit of land to be used collectively for agro-industrial purposes by female non-ejidatarias. This has occurred despite the fact that since 1982, a small group of women has been actively organized under the initiative of rural promoters from CEICADAR. Because CEICADAR’s initiatives to promote rural development are funded in part by the Mexican state and many of their productive projects work in concert with other government institutions, support for the Peasant Women’s Group will be considered here as a current government program.

CEICADAR has provided technical assistance to the Peasant Women’s Group in a variety of areas. The first initiatives centred around organizing women to recognize and address their demands. This took the form of a focus group, which one woman claimed helped to improve how rural women were perceived in the general community:

Here we respect women now. But when we came to look at the peasant woman was the time when the peasant women’s group was formed. A woman named María Luisa came [...] they didn’t pay any attention to her. There was a president that said: ‘Lazy women that don’t have anything to do but go around inviting people!’ Well here the señores are really like that. But then my husband entered the presidency and they began to realize [...] Now they pay more attention to women because now when they have meetings, there are more women than men [...]. How the woman has risen
up from the woman who wasn’t worthy [...]. Now they value the woman (Doña Rosa, A-15, September 1994).

The pioneers of the group were those responsible for the first steps towards the installation of potable water, a project which was later taken over by their husbands. The project represented a great savings in women’s time. Drinking water no longer needed to be hauled, family members could bathe at home, and washing clothes, which has entailed two days of hauling laundry to and from the river, could now be accomplished in an afternoon at home.

The current technical assistance by CEICADAR includes weekly meetings with the group, enlisting representatives for state-wide gatherings of organized peasant women, the maintenance of a productive project, and efforts to create other projects. The current productive project underway is a livestock project, designed to educate peasant farmers on how to control reproduction, properly feed their animals, and practice preventive medicine. Since the majority of shepherding is done by women, they are the main participants of the program, which also encourages the participation of men. The program educates peasants on how to vaccinate their livestock and the importance of maintaining a strong gene pool. A principal part of the project is designed to reduce the amount of time women spend shepherding that could be employed elsewhere, specifically during the dry season when they must walk far distances in order to find pasture land. Shepherds buy the animal feed, which is then milled at a rate per kilo. The greater part of the project is controlled and carried out by the project’s members.

The project, in theory, has its merits. Only a small group of San Migueleñas, however, have access to the project. The majority of the members are older women without childcare commitments and who have older daughters or daughter-in-laws that can assume the domestic responsibilities while they shepherd, attend weekly meetings, and go on the occasional organized event.27 Even among this group, those with restricted cash

27 Usually workshops in Puebla where women from throughout the state learn how to make marketable goods (snacks, soap, etc.)
resources cannot participate, since they would rather make the physical expenditure of taking the animals to pasture rather than spend a portion of the household budget on animal feed. Other time and money expenditures such as the outings are impossible for these women.

Before I had these two little girls, I had no children, just this older girl. For eight years, I accompanied them [the women’s group] here and there. But now with these two, how can I? [...] Now that I have my girls, well sometimes I don’t finish all I have to do [...]. Now I don’t have time (Doña Alicia, A-12, March 1995).

They invited us to join the group, but we have to pay to grind the fodder, and for us it is a little expensive. They charge [N$] 25 or 30 per hour and we have to buy the medicine and the molasses. Well, you don’t get out of animals what you invest. We’ve already told this to Don Jácobo, he knows that it is expensive. “Yes,” [he says] “But if you have a lot of animals...” [So you are not earning anything from the livestock project?] Well you’ve got it, I’m not [...]. Since I only have a few [heads], I don’t get any results [...]. I have about 10 little heads, twelve, and to pay the upkeep, well Don Esteban made my bill up at [SN] 180, for medicine and food. Apart from this is the grinding, this is [SN] 130. For this reason I am getting out of control. I say that’s it, no more (Doña Esperanza, A-2, October 1994).

Furthermore, women whose husbands are present in the household also face added obstacles in obtaining the money needed to participate in the various activities.

Sometimes I don’t go to the meetings, or I don’t go to the events at the Colegio [CEICADAR] for lack of bus fare. No one pays for us, it’s our money (Doña Esperanza, A-2, October 1994)

I like to be with the women to learn different things. He says, “If you have the money, go.” He doesn’t say, “Here’s your bus fare, go ahead now”. He says, “If you have money, go.” I say, “My sons are sending money, I will take a part.” [...] I don’t tell him I have money, I go along saving separately. With this I go, and with this I come back (Doña Esperanza, A-2, April 1995)

I like it; the only thing is that my husband doesn’t want me to participate. If the group breaks up tomorrow we will be in debt with them. How will we pay? (Doña Esperanza, A-2, March 1995).

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28One of the project’s field workers [name changed].
In addition, women from households with intensive male migration have little extra time, with the fields as their main commitment. Time constraints have led to certain people doing all the work for different phases of the productive project, which in one case led to frustration and taking leave from the group altogether: “Why? Why am I working, if the society never asked: ‘How is it going, how can we help you?’ Because if it’s a society, all of us are going to participate, right? [...] The people are bastards. Here they like profit totals. “Let’s see ... how much money is there?” But participation? Nothing” (March 1995).

Other projects in the works for the Peasant Women’s Group are a tortillería and a bakery. The land for the project, located in the urban centre, had to be purchased by the women in the group. They are currently petitioning for further financial support from various government agencies. This project got off to a rocky start. In the meeting where the rural promoters asked which women would make the commitment to participate, the number that declined was greater than those who offered their support. Reasons were solicited and the responses were similar to the criticisms of the livestock project: money and time. After a pair of lengthy speeches by the rural promoters, more women consented to participate.

Whether the material benefits of the projects are real for women, the principal benefits cannot be measured. Despite criticisms on the shortcomings of the projects and the obstacles to a wider participation in other activities, one woman claimed that the importance of being in the group was the feeling of struggling to make advancements:

It makes me exited, I like it. I say that perhaps one day things will change and we will not do the work we do now. Now I want to forget the work from times before. And I don’t want to weave the petate but other little things. I tell you, this is what I like” (Doña Esperanza, A-2, March 1995).

Similarly, despite complaints, other members interviewed claimed to enjoy being part of the group. Some were able to attend gatherings organized by CEICADAR that involved traveling to other states and meeting peasant women from various regions of Mexico and
their own state. As Aranda (1993) notes, despite the drawbacks of the majority of rural women’s groups organized around productive projects, in many areas of the Mexican countryside, “women have been able to obtain some elements --for example to know that they are not isolated --that have given them or facilitated better conditions --or less obstacles-- in negotiations and arrangements that they have to undertake with their husbands or families, in their organizations or communities” (1993:188).

Notwithstanding, from observations made in meetings and interviews with participants, the livestock project underway in San Miguel is open to severe criticisms. To sum up, the program has not taken the necessary steps to become more inclusive of women at different phases in their domestic cycle or of those with limited resources. Secondly, the practical element of the program functions only for those women with considerable livestock, again excluding those with limited resources. Moreover, although the livestock project centers on women as producers, the women’s group has done little to assist women in recognizing their agrarian rights. The land for the productive project (a tortilla shop and bakery) was bought, without considering as a possibility organizing to demand a parcel, to compensate for the UAIM San Miguel’s women were denied. Rather than explore the reforms to Article 27 and how they affect women, one of the day trips organized by CEICADAR involved a rally where the governor passed out land titles received under PROCEDE. The “peasant woman” being advocated in San Miguel by rural promoters, despite their personal convictions and training, is one that falls in line with the image created by the government since the agrarian reform project that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century: the wife of a direct beneficiary.

4.6 Final Reflections

In San Miguel, the official abandonment of policies aimed at improving national food self-sufficiency and the substitution of welfare programs to cushion the blows condemns San Migueleños to the same conditions of production (or worse) that they experienced at the time of land redistribution in the 1930s. Furthermore, the conditions
under which they produce are now facing ecological challenges (soil erosion and climatic change) and a dependency on purchased fertilizer. As the cycle of agricultural and economic crises continues, San Migueleños continue to exercise the livelihood strategy that equipped their town with basic services and commodities found in urban areas—emigration. Evolving in a context of unequal gender relations, emigration remains a male survival strategy, despite rising female participation. With migrant absences, women have assumed a larger role in ensuring the reproduction of the peasant unit on many fronts, a defense against the instability of remittances, the maintenance of a way of life, and resistance to a globalizing world that considers their production not ‘competitive’. While the taking on of new responsibilities have allowed women to enter formerly “male” spaces and improve their status, it has come at a high physical and emotional cost.

The extent of the ‘feminization of San Miguel’ has widened as emigration stopped being cyclical and began to involve lengthy absences. Again, patterns of emigration are under threat of another transformation. The devastating social consequences of the neoliberal project, which have become most apparent since the drastic peso devaluation in December of 1994, have made the dollar-route more attractive; not only for rural communities faced with rising prices for consumer goods, devalued local currency, and less chances of finding local employment but also for the urban poor and middle-class. Furthermore, with greater numbers of Mexicans fleeing northward and tighter anti-immigration winds brewing in the north (also a manifestation of global restructuring), border crossings of San Miguel’s migrants will become less frequent, absences more extended. From the texts of participants quoted in this chapter, it appears that the neoliberal project has held outcomes for rural communities—which of which the brunt has been borne by rural women—that have been far from positive.

Notwithstanding, the sweeping changes that are transforming the Mexican countryside, the Mexican economy, and the global economy as a result of neoliberal or “corporate” agendas in other countries, may bring about unexpected local responses. In
San Miguel, this is manifested in the desire to maintain community life, albeit a revised "ruralidad". Young people who have worked in "el otro lado" have little desire to do the work their parents do, but they demonstrate the desire to create other alternatives. One young couple working in the north saved enough money to open a small-scale supermarket in a nearby town. Migrants continue to send money to construct homes for their married life, and have an overall preference for marrying someone from the community. One migrant claimed that although he liked to work in L.A.:

I don't want my family to be there [...]. There it is a free country. You can decide what you want. But for the same reason that it is free, many things happen in the streets sometimes, there's a lot of danger. And I don't want to live with my family there. I feel that I'll destroy my family there, I feel that there--I don't like to live there. To work, yes. But to live with my family, no. I don't like it (Benjamín, A-34, September 1994).

Similarly, the community fiesta structure is strongly reinforced by both the efforts of those who remain in San Miguel who fulfill the cargo duties and the migrants who pay the costs. San Miguéleños are not only re-making a new community in the north, they are revising the original in a two-way exchange. In the coming years, responses from San Miguel will no doubt reflect the broader role San Miguélenas women have established as mothers, emigrants, police commanders, producers, comadres, and mayordomas in the community.
Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo, at first glance, appears to be a San Migueleño farmer's dream. Far from the white, dry, unwelcoming plains of the Tentzo Cordillera, this community is located in the green, fertile Atlixco Valley of Mexico's central plateau. This zone, blessed with high quality soils, climatic conditions considered by Atlixquenses to be 'the best in the world', and extensive irrigation, is well suited to the needs of commercial-oriented agriculture. Peasant farmers in Nexatengo produce a variety of high-value crops on their fully irrigated ejido, including vegetables, forage crops, and flowers. These producers are well connected to important regional and national markets, located only five kilometres from the bustling regional centre of Atlixco and the Puebla-Mexico City highway (Appendix 7).

As producers of vegetables and flowers for commercial sale, it would appear that peasant farmers in Nexatengo are pursuing a more profitable, "modern" route of agriculture, in line with official strategies to promote the country's 'comparative advantage'. Compared to San Migueleños, agricultural producers in Nexatengo--with their irrigated land and marketable produce--would be considered 'privileged peasants.' Field research, however, found both producers and workers in Nexatengo very deeply affected by the current agricultural crisis. Informants claimed that instead of improving, the socio-economic conditions under which they farm had become more precarious: commercial production of vegetables and flowers had become a money-losing venture. They explained that the risks involved in agriculture had become greater, with rising investment costs and lower market prices. They described situations of severe indebtedness to local loan sharks after crop failure or rock-bottom prices and abandonment by the banks. They claimed that up until the last ten years, large numbers of young
Nexatengans working as dishwashers in New York was unimagined. Furthermore, they claimed that employment in the *ejido* lands was disappearing at the same time more physically demanding and lesser paid “female” positions in the large capitalist farms were coming available.

The transitions taking place in this rural community as the neoliberal development model takes its toll on an already disadvantaged peasant sector are inscribed by gender relations at the community level and on a global scale. Most significant is the gendered outcomes for the local labour market and the world labour market that have unfolded with the decline of small-scale labour-intensive peasant agriculture and the corresponding rise of large capitalist exporting ranches. Rather than change employers, day workers have been confronted with the ranches’ preference for a female proletariat. Male day labourers, faced with fewer attractive job opportunities and low wages that cannot ensure subsistence, form the large majority of international migration flows. Grandmothers become mothers again, as women find work in the ranches or leave for the north themselves and leave childcare up to their parents. With farming no longer profitable and life more precarious, land sales begin, and women are the first to (illegally) sell their *ejidos*.

This chapter provides a portrait of the implications for rural communities of government policies towards the countryside during neoliberal restructuring, with a focus on how gender relations are inscribing, defining, and determining outcomes in a commercial agricultural community. These “privileged” peasants are experiencing a crisis in their livelihood, and the consequences are transforming the face of the community—gender relations. This chapter opens with a brief description of agricultural production and community life in Nexatengo. The next section explores the crisis and implications of government policies.

**5.1 OVERVIEW: EMILIANO ZAPATA NEXATENGO**

Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo is located 30 kilometres to the south-east of the state capital of Puebla and five kilometres outside the regional centre of Atlixco, the commercial
centre of this fertile valley largely dedicated to commercial agriculture (Appendix 7). The valley sits at an altitude of 1881 metres above sea level, on the slopes of the volcano Popocatépetl (Fig.5.1). The climate is classified as temperate sub-humid, with the average temperature ranging from 15° to 22°C. Annual precipitation varies between 740-1000 millimetres, and the dry season occurs during July and August, lasting a month to a month and a half. In the rainy season hail is common. On surrounding hills and gullies, trees of pine, evergreen oak, and oyamel can be identified as vegetation native to the area, as well as a variety of shrubs and brushwood.¹

Fig.5.1 A scene from the Atlixco Valley: fields of cempasuchitl and terciopelo

Today, Nexatengo is home to over 1000 residents.² The ejido’s Carpeta Básica (an ejido’s archive of its agrarian history and important documents) records that the

¹In Mexico, oyamel is a type of industrial conifer, similar to the pine fir (Diccionario Porrua, 1992).
²The national census of 1990 records Nexatengo’s population at 731 residents (INEGI, 1990). A community census undertaken a year later, however, records 953 inhabitants. In 1996, INEGI claimed to have once again conducted a census of the community; yet residents claim that although enumerators arrived in the two surrounding communities, they never arrived in Nexatengo. The estimation used in the thesis, of 1086 residents, was calculated by the National Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Población) using statistics from the 1990 INEGI census, but must be taken as a rough estimation only.
community began as a small settlement which after land distribution (1932) was constituted by 27 ejidatarios with tenancy rights. The town's original 27 families, some of whom worked on the Bauer's3 hacienda in Nexatengo, have since handed over or sold off portions of their urban parcels to family members and landless farm labourers who came to the commercial farming belt in search of work since the 1940s. Due to the dividing up of urban parcels, the community's layout resembles a patchwork quilt: larger parcels are interspersed with parcels so small that one woman built the two rooms of her tiny house on top of each other (the first two-story house in the town). Practically every inch of the urban parcels that is not dwelling space hosts some form of agricultural production, such as corn, flowers, or fruit, for both family consumption and commercial sale. Inner patios are also intensively utilized, where women are the principal caretakers of trees such as avocado, peach, lime; a variety of herbs such as basil and mint; and various flowers for decoration. Many families also produce and market milk on a small scale. The black and white jersey cows find their homes in cement corrals or corrugated steel shelters a few metres from residents' dwellings, along with horses, a few pigs, turkeys, chickens, and even rabbits. The pasture land of the ejido, distant from the fields of cultivation, is located on a rocky hillside which is host to a variety of small trees and shrubs. Forestry resources on this land are not being extensively exploited at the present, owing to the distance of the pasture land, the introduction of gas stoves, and the community's access to cash income.

Residents' dwellings are constructed from a mix of different materials, often a reflection of changing economic circumstances. Unlike San Miguel, not a single palm house remains standing, although they did exist. Building materials include adobe, cement block, and to a lesser extent, brick. Adobe is the most popular building material with thatched roofs. Many of the newer homes have corrugated metal roofs or cement roofs like those in San Miguel. Various residents have plastered their homes, and a few are painted bright colours. Most floors are dirt, some are cement, and some families have

3A pseudonym.
ceramic tiles. Dwellings are often composed of one to two rooms, with a kitchen set apart, often made of *carrizo* (hardened corn stalks that serve as poles), metal sheeting, adobe, or block. These kitchens are usually well-ventilated, because many house a *tlecuil* (hearth) for cooking. Most homes have gas stoves, and some even have gas *comales*, but others must rely on strictly wood-burning fires or carbon-burning metal barbecues. Extra rooms are often of a different material and have been added on to the house as the families have come into money due to a good harvest, or more recently, from migrant remittances. Each home’s interior includes an altar, lavishly decorated with fresh cut flowers, often including top-quality roses or exotic varieties brought home by the young women working in the ranches. Most families have beds, a clothes bureau, and at least one television. Many have stereo systems, ghetto blasters and video tape machines. Popular art is of the Catholic iconographic genre alongside glossy rock-star posters and shiny sports trophies.

Due to the *ejido*’s proximity to Atlixco and the original small size of the community, it is considered a suburb, or *colonia*. This helps explain why Nexatengo has been overlooked in terms of some basic services, such as the provision of a health centre. For low-cost health care, residents have the option of spending long hours waiting at the health centres in Atlixco, or to go to the nearby town of Santa Ana Coatepec. Due to the declining quality of these services, however, even the poorest of families will become indebted in order to pay for a private doctor in the case of an emergency. For deliveries, most women prefer midwives since they are trusted more and charge less.

The town does not have a secondary school. This has meant only a privileged number of children continue their education beyond primary, since the daily round-trip bus fare to Atlixco on top of tuition fees can be a serious economic stress for most families, who can use the extra labour around the house and in the fields. Some land-holding families, however, have been able to educate their children in Mexico City universities, as doctors, teachers, and even doctorate-holding marine biologists. In terms of primary education, the community has a primary school (opened in 1932) and a kindergarten.
For civil registry services, once again Nexatengans can stand in line in Atlixco, where they have to submit a number of documents, or go to Santa Ana Coatepec. The community appoints its own Municipal Inspector and Justice of the Peace, in addition to the Ejido commissariat and vigilance committee.

Families in Nexatengo were also denied their own parish until recently. The church building, part of the hacienda, fell out of use after the Revolution. It was revived in the early 1980s and is currently undergoing extensive restorations. A traveling Catholic priest comes in for weekly mass. Before the revival of their parish, Nexatengo’s church-going families traveled to Atlixco by donkey or by horse-drawn carts. It was also feasible to walk the five kilometres to attend church or visit the Tuesday and Saturday markets. However, now the community relies on micro-buses that come and go every 15 - 30 minutes between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. (Fig. 5.2). The road is in poor condition, including the stretch of cobble stone extending around the ranch El Corazón, but apparently a paved road is on the municipality’s agenda. For those who have pick-ups, they can also access the Atlixco-Mexico City highway, located 4 kilometres from town.

The community relies on basic services such as electricity (introduced in 1977), public telephone (1992), and drainage (1994). Piped potable water, however, has not been installed. Many families have deep wells or have access to those of their neighbours. Cholera is prevented by adding chlorine to wells, but in the rainy season parasitic infections abound, especially among children. Many families have electrical pumps for their wells, making washing clothes less difficult for women. Most, however, wash their family’s clothes in the irrigation canals that run through the urban parcel (Fig.5.3). For households that cannot afford it, toilets and heated showers are becoming popular, especially among those with family members in North America.

4All the ranches have been given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity
The town, like most within areas of commercial agriculture, has a tortillería (opened in 1992). It is a project funded by the government agency D.I.F. Desarrollo Integral Familiar (Integral Family Development) for communities that have a high proportion of rural day labourers.\footnote{This is a time saver for day labourers and also has decreased the amount of time spend waiting in line for mill services for those families who still make their own tortillas. Families who continue to make tortillas are either too impoverished to make the extra cash expenses and/or have the available female labour to dedicate to the task. Better-off families often have large, gas fed comales that come to waist level (which avoids the traditional position of kneeling on the ground) and have the luxury of extra female labour. Bought tortillas are generally considered as inferior in taste and quality.} Day workers are principally employed by producers planting within the ejido, or on one of the three capitalist floriculture ranches surrounding the ejido. To the north is El Corazón, producing principally orchids, that enjoyed its best years in the 1970s-80s, but has since suffered poor administration since the owner died and left the ranch to his son. On the east side of the community is the hacienda of Nexatengo which recently (1991) converted 3 of its 74 hectares into greenhouses for export quality roses, as well as planting gladiola and statice in the fields for the national market (Fig.5.4). The ranch, "Girasol", is currently one of the most active employers. It receives financial...
support from Bancomext, who demands export production as a condition for financing.

To the south is El Diamante which has been in operation since 1982. Its 40 hectares are dedicated to the production of orchids and statice for export to North American markets. All the owners are Mexican entrepreneurs who received their land through inheritance.

Fig. 5.3 Washing clothes in an irrigation canal

The socio-economic structure existing in Nexatengo is far from homogeneous. Even among ejidatarios a great degree of social differentiation exists, due to such factors as access to secondary income or historical experience with the wide variety of commercial crops that have been planted in Nexatengo since the 1950s. Although some day labourers may be in better economic circumstances than a poor ejidatario, they occupy a lower status in the social hierarchy and have less influence in community decision-making. Ejidatarios refer to the day labourers as ‘those who just have a place to live’. Interestingly enough, such divisions are inscribed upon the community’s fiesta-structure--only
ejidatarios can be mayordomos for Nexatengo's only big fiesta (December 31-January 2). Day labourers, however, may elect themselves to host one of the nine meals of the three festival days.

Today, landless residents make a living by farming though rental or sharecropping agreements with ejidatarios; by selling their labour to small producers, ejidatarios, or one of the nearby capitalist ranches; or by emigrating to the United States, most commonly New York. Migration is becoming a rising social phenomenon in the community, representing an important economic contribution for both landless and land holding families.

Fig.5.4 The church of Nexatengo attached to the hacienda/Girasol ranch

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6 "The fiesta is in honour of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The priest has been unsuccessful in convincing Nexatengueños to change the date to coincide with the real date dedicated to this saint (December 12)."

7 "The six mayordomos are in the church, and between these six they have to chip in for everything. Those who are picked to host the meals are those who only have a place to live, that are not ejidatarios." (Doña Mariana, Z-3, December 1994)
5.1.2 Agricultural Production in Nexatengo

A diversity of crops are grown on Nexatengo's 109 irrigated hectares. A walk through the *ejido* offers both spectacular colours and scents. In late October, for example, the *ejido* lands are often filled with bright orange *cempasuchitl* (flower of death), magenta *terciopelo* (a large, velvety flower), or pastel shades of gladiolas. Even from a distance, on harvest days one can perceive the rich aromas of the principal vegetable crops such as cilantro, onions, or epazote. Alfalfa, another key crop, serves as the principal forage of dairy cows. Like the surrounding valley communities with the exception of the principal trading centre of Atlixco, agricultural exploitation is the principal household reproduction strategy in Nexatengo. Current agricultural production of the *ejido* involves a number of different actors--ejidatarios, landless residents who rent or sharecrop the land, and investors from outside the zone who rent the land, invest the capital, and hire Nexatengo's producers to direct production. There are also the day labourers who may be paid workers or unpaid family labour, adults or children.

A Brief History of Land Tenancy and Production

Irrigated agriculture has existed in this region for centuries, although water distribution has been radically transformed several times. Large-scale irrigated agriculture supported the Aztec Empire, and thus following the Conquest, the valley became one of the most prosperous breadbaskets for New Spain, producing wheat as a principal crop (Marroni, 1995; Ocampo, 1994). The 17th century was a period of high production for the valley, with the production of sugarcane. The area suffered a process of decline during the subsequent period but entered a new boom at the end of the 19th century with the rise of the Porfirian haciendas, which were involved in the production of wheat, fruits, and vegetables.

The territory was actively involved in Mexico's revolutionary struggles at the turn of the 19th century, which is reflected in the names of the agrarian communities.
surrounding Nexatengo: La Revolución, La Libertad, Juan Ubera. The main wave of land redistribution took place between 1926 and 1930, when 75% of land in the zone was reorganized into ejidos and agrarian communities, and by 1945 land reform had come to a close in the region (Marroni, 1995).

Fig. 5.5 A walk through the ejido

Private property was not eliminated completely, with ranches and small properties existing alongside one another, as is the case of Nexatengo. During the Porfiriato (1876-1911), the Bauer hacienda was a large commercial producer of corn and more importantly, wheat. When the agrarian reform process redistributed the land to Nexatengo’s residents in 1932, the ranch preserved 74 hectares of prime farm land. From the Bauer’s expropriated lands and lands from two other haciendas, the new agrarian

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*The community under study was named after the revered general himself. However, due to the confusion generated by a near-by town of the same name, the community has retained its pre-Revolutionary appellation to date. It is most commonly referred to in this thesis as Nexatengo, the name the residents most commonly use, in which the “x” is pronounced like the Spanish “j”.*
structure included 109 hectares of irrigated lands and 100.53 hectares of pasture, divided among 27 *ejidatarios* and their families. Each *ejidatario* was allotted 3 hectares of irrigated land and a 0.5 hectare lot in the residential zone. Although today the agricultural lots remain largely un-fragmented and farmed jointly by the original *ejidatarios’* children, as mentioned earlier, the residential lots often house two to five families (relatives of the *ejidatarios*), have small areas under cultivation, or have been partially sold off to the landless families of Nexatengo.

All Nexatengo’s original 27 beneficiaries of land reform were men. As was discussed in Chapter 3, this community adheres to patterns of patrilocal residence and patrilineal land inheritance. Women are residual inheritors and even when they do receive land in their names they do not share the same privileges as men in the exercise of property rights. This includes entry into leadership positions that have an influence on the community’s development, which are dominated by men, with the exception of one three-year period over 15 years ago. The specifics of the gendered nature of *ejido* rights will be explored later in this chapter.

Following the land redistribution process, the new *ejidatarios* generally followed one of two strategies: they continued to plant the basic grains (wheat and corn) that had been produced on the *hacienda*, or they rented their land and sold their labour power to their fellow *ejidatarios*. Many *ejidatarios* were forced into the latter situation because they simply did not have the productive resources necessary to cultivate their land grants. With land, but no liberty to farm, they put them up for rent. An *ejidatario* explains:

> When the war calmed down, they redistributed the land for no more than five years. And then [land redistribution] finished. Many received their lands and left them. They didn’t have anything to work them with, why did they want land? [...] My father, since he had training in how to work, began to work the land again, with his animals. Since he was a relative of the rich people, when the Revolution ended, some of the administrators of the Chilhuacan *hacienda*—because he was from the *hacienda* over there—they told him, ‘Go see what animals were left, gather them up, they are for you.’ (Don Tómas, Z-30, May 1995)
This situation allowed for a more extensive production (eight to ten hectares) of wheat by ‘luckier’ *ejidatarios*, who were often privileged *peones* within the *hacienda*. Thus began the 20th century chapter of a long tradition of temporary rental and share-cropping arrangements and social differentiation that exists to date.

In the mid 1950s, basic grain production was gradually abandoned in Nexatengo for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables in the face of declining profits and the wheat mill owners’ growing control of the production process. One *ejidatario* states: ‘we began to feel like *peones* of the mill. Before we could hire *peones* to lift our sacks [of wheat] on to the cart at the mill; later we had to do this. We were doing everything, and earning less than before’ (Don Tómas, Z-30, April 1995). By the 1960s, most producers had replaced their wheat crops with commercial vegetables for the growing regional market in Atlixco, one of the nation’s most important commercial centres. The crops that had existed in small vegetable gardens since pre-Hispanic times became the new basis for production, such as tomatoes, *tomatillos* (green tomatoes), and *huahuzontle* (jalapeno) peppers with three harvests per year. Some producers began to plant pre-Hispanic flowers on a larger scale, especially varieties such as *cempasuchitl* and *terciopelo*, whose consumption on the national market occurs once a year for the Days of the Dead (Oct.30-Nov.2). At the end of the 1970s, producers and merchants from San Martin Texmelucan (also in the state of Puebla) arrived in the Atlixco valley, introducing new crops such as onions, zucchinis, cilantro, radish, string beans, forage and floriculture crops (Ocampo, 1994).

Green revolution techniques slowly came to be employed in the production process. Several producers claim this trend began with the arrival of foreign capital investment in the late 1960s, when a group of Japanese investors began to rent *ejido* land in a nearby community for the production of flowers.

*We saw that they [the investors] were producing better harvests [...] Since it was cheap—the fertilizer—we began to do experiments, to buy fertilizer. And it worked, since the land had never tried fertilizer [...] From then on, everyone got a move on to use fertilizer* (Don Tómas, Z-30, May 1995).
In the past, the earth produced without fertilizers, and now one has to spend [money] on all this, fertilizers, liquids, fumigants, and everything [...] Well, this started when the Japanese began to arrive [...] to plant gladiola. This is where it all began, one began fumigating, fumigating, fertilizing, fertilizing (Doña Luisa, Z-7, May 1995).

These Japanese investors also introduced new varieties of flowers, such as the gladiola. These trends are similar to those that took place with the arrival of Japanese foreign investment in the state of Mexico in 1970 with the goal of renting *ejido* land for commercial floriculture (Lara and Becerril, in press).

**Organization of Commercial Agriculture**

How has the productive process for a labour-intensive agriculture been organized in Nexatengo? In terms of categories of peasant farmers, a dynamic land market has generated a diversity of producers. Not all producers are *ejidatarios* and not all *ejidatarios* are producers. Some *ejidatarios* are used to putting their land up for rent or sharecropping it for reasons such as family labour shortages, lack of capital needed for cultivation, or the need for a secure source of income. Those who rent/sharecrop include more successful *ejidatarios* looking for additional *ejido* land or the landless that may cultivate small portions of land from one season to the next to supplement their income.

A main source of social differentiation between the above-mentioned producers is their access to the capital necessary for the high investments vegetables and flowers require. For example, cultivation of certain flowers such as gladiola that are planted by bulb requires heavy capital outlays. The group of producers planting gladiola, then, has rarely included the landless, whose only cash income comes from the sale of their own labour power. *Ejidatarios*, on the other hand, can collect land rents from one hectare while continuing to farm other plots.

Like the group of producers, the labour market serving peasant agriculture is also highly differentiated, including the landless, children of *ejidatarios*, and surprisingly
enough, even less-fortunate *ejidatarios.* The labour market in the Atlixco zone has included both men and women, children and adults, belying past biases in peasant research that casts the ‘typical’ day labourer as an adult male. Records of women’s and children’s participation in farming in this zone go back to the Porfiriato (Mertens, 1983 cited in Marroni, 1993). Women and children, however, have often constituted the ranks of unpaid family labour, a factor that contributes to their invisibility in the productive process. The degree of non-remunerated family labour involved in an operation varies according to socio-economic status of the producers. For example, in “well-off” families the wife--although often a day labourer all her unmarried life--is prohibited from working after marriage, which serves as a form of gender control the family can afford as well as making available additional female labour for domestic tasks. In poorer families, however, out of necessity the wife will work within the family parcel or sell her labour power up until the hour she gives birth and return soon after. One ranch owner claims: “I have girls working here that [...] are working the day of their delivery. Recently, two months ago, at 11 o’clock a girl was working and she says, ‘Ma’am, can I leave for a minute?’ And in the door she was giving birth” (April 1996). The incorporation of family labour is fluid as the household’s economic health. As Marroni claims:

   The volume of surplus generated in the parcel can retain a woman in the same productive unit, and intensify her production in it when the margins of profitability are tight and do not permit the hiring of *peones.* But it can also confine her to the domestic space if profits permit the hiring of *peones.* In an inverse way, it can demand her proletarianization when the functioning of the parcel is deficit, and demanding of alternative income sources. In the case of families without land, the proletarianization of women is practically a demand (1995:148, my translation).

   Women working in the family parcel have a subordinate position in the production process. Even if a woman working on the family parcel is the owner of that land, her

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*The one case I came across was Doña Benita, an elderly *ejidataria who has no family to work her lands and no capital to invest in farming. The household head for her migrant daughter’s four children, she must work to meet the family’s needs.*
husband is still the chief of production. Doña Josefina claims: "You are like nothing more than a peón, like a worker. Yes, to hurry up and work. Here it is always the man that manages everything, that directs" (Z-10, May 1995).

For remunerated workers, both the tasks and pay involved in agricultural production in the Atlixco Valley zone have been differentiated according to gender. Women's wages, like children's, are lower and their work is given a lesser value. One day labourer explains:

This señor is giving 150 [pesos] to the women [per week]. And to the men, he is giving 180, 200, according to the work they carry out [...]. Heavier things are for the men and they earn a higher wage for this reason. And for a woman, she just has her [one] task, [to weed] her row (Josefina, Z-10, November 1994).

As a rule, men have been slotted into activities that require physical force--such as plowing--and those that are linked to modern technology--such as driving tractors, applying pesticides (Marroni, 1995). Women and children are involved in manual tasks that require a high degree of concentration and dexterity, such as planting, weeding or harvesting. Although men and boys may be hired for these activities, it is uncommon for a woman to undertake tasks formally assigned to men as they are socially prohibited from these domains (Marroni, 1995:147).

Employment offered by peasant producers since the introduction of labour intensive crops has been temporary. Three growing cycles per year, however, maintains an almost constant labour demand. A worker's schedule is completely flexible, since they can miss work if necessary. The flexibility this work provides makes it particularly convenient to women with children whose husbands' wages are insufficient or who are heads of households. An eight hour work day is the norm, and employers are expected to provide workers with a small a meal and something to drink at midday. The relationship between the producer and work team is often amicable; these day labourers are often working for their neighbours or relatives. Wages, although higher than in zones of subsistence
agriculture, are considered insufficient to maintain a household. The workers employed here are likely to have spouses or other family members also working for a wage. Families who rely on a single day labourer's wages have a very restricted household budget.

Today, the variety of crops produced in Nexatengo has changed. Tomatoes are no longer planted, but other vegetables with short growing cycles such as cilantro, onions, and epazote have persisted, sometimes meaning three harvests per year. Floral crops still include Day of the Dead varieties and gladiolas. Varieties of statice are also produced. These floral crops require the heaviest investments but bring in the highest profits. Overall, the production of flowers and vegetables had initial significant profits for Nexatengo's producers. A good harvest could mean an added room to the house, a couple of beds, the purchase of a work animal, further education of a son or daughter. An expanding domestic market for fruits, vegetables, and flowers in Mexico as a result of changing consumption patterns since the 1960s no doubt had some positive repercussions in this zone.

While agricultural production in Nexatengo is commercially oriented and diversified, however, it has always faced serious challenges characteristic to peasant production in the zone: water resources are poorly managed (i.e. squandered), property is excessively fragmented, and traditional practices of productive organization and commerce persist (Marroni, 1994). These factors help explain why Nexatengo's peasant farmers have been increasingly unable to cope with the recent agricultural crisis and incapable of competing under economic restructuring. Nexatengo's producers entered a crisis of profitability in the mid 1980s, a crisis which continues to be aggravated by the country's declining economic health. Today they are facing both higher input prices and stagnating producer prices, while they have no access to credit. Furthermore, the cost of providing

10The wages for a woman daylabourer ranged from N$ 25-30 per day (US$3.30-4.50) while those for a male day labourer ranged from N$ 30-50 ($4.50-6.50). Wages as high as N$ 50 were reserved for those employed as foremen or plowmen who had their own work animals.
for their families has gone up. Agricultural production, and correspondingly, labour markets, in Nexatengo are once again at a turning point.

5.2 "YA NO SE PUEDE": The crisis of commercial-oriented peasant farming

Cilantro? They take it in the trucks to Mexico. Here they return and on the bridge, at the ravine, they throw out all the cilantro, they throw out the gladiolas, they throw out the zucchinis [...] The trucks stops there and they throw out everything [...] they don't sell [...] The fertilizers, the liquids, everything is so expensive. All this is expensive except what we go to sell. Now we remain like this. Now those who are better off are the people that are working in the ranches, because everything that you plants—we plant one thing and it doesn't work, we plant another, and it's the same [...] You can't make a living from it any more. Now those who have their cows, have so much alfalfa and if not, buy it from those who do. The milk is also not paid. They take the milk and then the milkman disappears. Can you believe it? Or he doesn't come to pay for two, three months. Now you cannot make a living any way. And not only one person will say this; many are talking about it. (Don Alfredo, Z-31, April 1995)

The thing was we would spend a lot of money and remain even deeper, more indebted [...] My uncle Tómas went bankrupt too, not only ourselves, various people went bankrupt, many from the neighbourhood. Before, at the most you had your peones, now, who has peones? They go to the ranches, with Bauer, or they go to El Diamante, many go to Atlixco or if not they go to the north. Many people have already gone; what are we going to do here? Nothing, now. That's the thing, now you can't. Can you imagine: my uncle Tómas, also an owner of 2 ejido [plots], and look, he doesn't even have peones. He too, has bought his cows now, because he did not have cows before. He too is bankrupt (Amelia, Z-13, May 1995).

The above texts provide accurate summaries of the status quo of agricultural production in Nexatengo. The complex factors that have brought about the declining profitability of commercial crops for peasant farmers is expressed in day-to-day life as a typical cost-price squeeze: costs of inputs continue to skyrocket, while producer prices remain stuck in the 1980s. The December 1994 devaluation was the final blow to many producers reliant on foreign agro-chemicals, as many “popular” products changed price

11Translation: “Now it can no longer be done,” perhaps the most recurrent phrase in conservations about farming in Nexatengo.
from week to week, to stabilize at three times their 1994 cost. The supply end of the market, which had expanded with government sponsored irrigation projects in the 1970s, has also been hurt by restricted domestic consumption in a declining economy. Producers have been adapting to declining profitability since the 1980s; however, the restrictions to peasant agriculture of the 1990s and the consequences of past development initiatives have collided to make flower and vegetable production extremely unattractive to most peasant producers. Peasant farmers are switching to crops that are neither labour nor capital intensive such as alfalfa, but have not yet developed the mechanisms to make this a viable household reproduction strategy. The following section explores the manifestations of the current crisis in Nexatengo.

5.2.1 To Market, to Market ... What Market?

You plant, you produce, the crops look beautiful, but at harvesting hour, you go to the market and there are no prices. Sometimes it is thrown out. Sometimes you don’t get out what you invest in order to harvest it. In order to harvest you have to hire people to make the cases, the bundles, or whatever, and the transport charges. Later you have to pay toll booths, and you arrive at the market and there are no prices [...]. You don’t get anything out for the transport charges nor for the labour costs. So that is what happens here. The market? Well, there is none. Production, there is a lot, but a market, no. (Roberto, Z-37, November 1994)

Historically, the Atlixco market has been the destination for Nexatengo’s agricultural goods. This regional market, however, has become extremely unstable, principally plagued by flooding due to a great lack of communication among small producers in the zone. Nexatengo’s producers claim that part of the problem was the installation of irrigation in many communities in recent years. Two producers claim:

[The banks] have lent a lot of money to the people in the hills, for their rain-fed plots, and they have made wells. Therefore there is a lot of production [...]. The more the government helps us, the more they bother us. I remember going down near Matamoros, through San Felipe, through Santa Ana. What did you see? Just the stubble of corn fields, year after year, every season they planted. And now for years it’s been tomatoes,
cilantro, zucchini. And because they are virgin lands, there is truly beautiful production (Don Bénito, Z-32, February 1995).

[T]here were times when you planted wherever and sold high. But now, I think what hurt us were all the cash loans to make wells [...]. So a lot of [production] entered the market and now it is saturated (Doña Elizabet, Z-1, December 1994).

Indeed, the period between 1977 to 1982 was a time of significant growth of irrigation in the zone, as PIDER assisted peasants to tap subterranean water supplies through the construction of deep wells (Ocampo, 1994). As a result, production of fruits and vegetables in the region of Atlixco rose considerably. Under both the de la Madrid and Salinas administrations, irrigation continued to expand; between 1989 and 1991 production of fruits and vegetables rose 37.8% (Ocampo, 1994). This reflects the bias in official efforts to assist small producers that have been largely confined to production with little or no attention to marketing (Marsh and Runsten, 1995).

Producers pursued their own strategies in response to declining profitability with the search for new markets in the mid 1980s. Losing in Atlixco, many producers began to supply the Centrales de Abastos in Puebla and Mexico City. This was partly facilitated by some producers' ability to buy trucks, through access to agricultural credit or from cash remittances from children working in the United States or Mexico City. The vast majority of producers, however, lack the volume, stability, and capital to justify such a purchase. Most rent one of the two trucks in the community in addition to paying a chauffeur, gasoline, and toll booths.

Producers who cannot bear these costs sell to local intermediaries:

If we had something to take the flowers in, we would earn more; but now how we have intermediaries .... Here our compadre was paying us five [pesos] the bunch, and in Mexico I can imagine he was selling them at ten [pesos. Imagine if it were all for us? We have enough [money] to cover our cost but not to move about (Rosa, Z-22, May 1995).

12The Centrales de Abastos are massive supply centers for agricultural and other goods. Many restaurants, hotels, and consumers buy their goods here to avoid added costs. Goods are sold in bulk quantities.
Intermediaries also have control of the markets in Mexico City and Puebla. Producers who take their produce here estimate that their goods pass through three or four intermediaries before reaching the consumer. The disorganization of producers, their lack of information of market prices, and their desperation weakens their bargaining power: “you go to the Central de Abastos in Mexico and there the intermediary pays you what he wants: ‘If it suits you, I’ll pay you so much.’ And out of fear of not selling it, you do it” (Roberto, Z-38, April 1995).

Fig. 5.6 and 5.7 Loading trucks with statice and bouquet foliage

Despite the intermediaries and transport costs, Nexatengo’s peasant farmers were finding better rewards in Mexico City. These markets continue to draw producers, but they have also become flooded and have ceased to ensure reasonable profits. Part of the
competition is not just between peasant producers but the capitalist ranchers that cultivate large sections of land, hire trained agronomists as permanent staff, have access to credit, and are aware of market conditions. A peasant farmer explains:

We go to Mexico [City] with these vegetables now; we sell the most in Mexico, because there we sell by the truck-load of onions [...]. But there, there are 30 drivers! So then the onions are really cheap, because there are too many. Then the hacendados (hacienda owners) like Bauer also plant onions, they also plant cilantro, they also plant gladiolas. And well these guys are big industrialists, and of course they screw the peasant's product. (Bénito, Z-32, November 1994)

Like other vegetable producing regions, the bigger producers are also those in positions to gain access to more stable contract arrangements since they have sufficient capital to wait for payment, whereas small producers need money to live and pay the debts they incurred during cultivation (Marsh and Runsten, 1995).

The only exception to these market relations for Nexatengo's producers is the contracting out of open-air flower production by the capitalist ranch, El Diamante. Only a small group of peasant households per crop variety have the contracts, many of whom have a family member employed in the ranch. El Diamante allows their contractors to buy their inputs on interest-free credit at better prices than Atlixco merchants offer. The amount charged is deducted from the harvest they deliver to the ranch. Producers are given a quota before each season concerning the amount of flower bouquets they can submit, and new members are not admitted to keep profits reasonable. El Diamante sets quality control standards, and thus provides their contractors with information concerning chemical and fertilizer application. The price they set for the end product is substantially higher than that obtained through intermediary-dominated local markets. El Diamante provides no insurance for crop failure, but the returns on a good crop are reasonable enough to allow for the occasional occurrence of nature. The crop does not belong to El Diamante, and producers can sell a slightly damaged crop on the local market, as well as
crop surplus. The benefits to the ranch are the avoidance of land rents and a committed group of contractors.

5.2.2 New and Old Loansharks

The small group of producers with El Diamante's contracts are some of the only producers that have avoided falling into cartera vencida (default) with the banks or severe cases of indebtedness with local loan sharks, closing the door to further financing. This comes as a great blow, considering the high costs of investment in commercial flower and vegetable production. Small peasant farmers who formed credit associations in the 1970s when Banrural was encouraging agricultural credit have declared bankruptcy. Bank credit did play an important role in the production process and Nexatengo's farmers were good debtors until prices began to drop. Market factors were not the only culprits; corrupt bank representatives also took advantage of one group of borrowers:

We haven't finished paying since they did the restructuring, because the person in charge [...] tricked us [...]. We no more than took our receipts to the bank and showed them and they didn't honour them because we had been tricked by the man who was the director. They fired him from the bank [...]. They told me that if the receipts were valid, if they were from the bank, I wouldn't owe a fifth of a cent. But because they [the bank representatives] received the money, we trusted that they deposited it (Doña Margarita, Z-6, June 1995).

Due to the degree of commercial production in the Atlixco Valley zone, official agricultural credit has been concentrated here and with it, cartera vencida:

Well we all realized that not only ourselves were left owing, but almost everyone that has tractors, all of the surrounding communities. They have held assembles in other communities. The representatives of the tractor went as far as locking up their house and leaving the keys, and going to the north, to see if they can recuperate the money. And from being people with money, they were left poor (Don Alfredo, Z-31, April 1995).

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13 Marsh and Runsten note that "in mid-1995 maize cost N$2,500 or less per hectare, while broccoli cost N$9,000, potatoes N$14,000, strawberries N$30,000 and the estimated cost of establishing a blackberry orchard was N$40,000 to N$70,000 per hectare" (1995:11).
For these reasons, many producers in the Atlixco zone have integrated themselves into *El Barzón*, a lobby group to pressure the government to restructure agricultural debt and in general, address bankruptcy across all sectors, even consumer debt.\(^{14}\) Although at the time of research there were no *barzonistas* among Nexatengo’s peasant farmers, the legal staff of *El Barzón* and peasant militants from other *ejidos* had begun to visit the community on a regular basis.

Most producers, including the landless who had always been disqualified from bank credit, have relied on long-established patterns of borrowing from their neighbours. Many peasants have been completely impoverished by the usurious interest rates. One producer describes two of their moneylenders:

The señora [...] charges an interest rate of 20\(^{\circ}\).\(^{15}\) We had the bad luck of asking her for 700 pesos. Of this money, the 700 pesos, we have already given her 1,300. Now she tells us we owe her 2,400 in interest, do you believe it? [...] Imagine that; we still have to pay [...]. Why do you think that señora lives as she does? Because so many poor people, miserable because we don’t have money at the moment, we go to her, ‘lend to me’. And she says yes because she knows she will charge (Doña Josefina, Z-10, December 1994).

I have an uncle that loaned us 1,500 [pesos]. And it was 12\(^{\circ}\), and if you did not pay monthly, he charged us surcharges and surcharges. Finally when calculated it up, it was close to 5,000 [pesos] that we should pay. My husband gave him 2,500. Later he came and wanted to collect a piece of the parcel (Doña Josefina, Z-10, October 1994).

Most landless families had become accustomed to borrowing money to plant and repaying after the harvest. However, since the market prices began to bottom-out just before harvest on a regular basis, many people have entered the international migration circuit in order to repay their debts. For example, four of Doña Josefina’s sons have gone to the north, “mortified” over their father’s debts incurred when planting. She claims:

\(^{14}\) *El Barzón* originally began as a social movement of small private producers and *ejidatarios* of Autlán and the region south of Jalisco, who organized themselves to protest *cartera vencida* (*La Jornada del Campo*, October 26, 1993).

\(^{15}\) The interest rates charged by most local loan sharks vary from 10 - 20 \(^{\circ}\), calculated *monthly*. 

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We are hoping that our sons send us a little money in the next few days. And we will pay 500 [pesos] and in the other months the other 500 [pesos] and that’s it [...]. Do you know that just between May and March my sons have sent us almost [...] 6,000 new pesos?¹⁶ Imagine what we could have done here in the house with that money. We could have made two more rooms, or put ceilings on their two rooms. But no, because we just have to give it away for the credit. It is very bad, it is very ugly having to borrow money. And we had always done it like this--it’s been some time now--but we never paid late, because the harvest was coming up, we made some money, and it was fine. We paid and we planted, and when we didn’t have enough to continue working, then we started to borrow [...] but we always paid afterwards. But now, one year went completely bad for us, the next year was the same, and we became completely indebted. And then there was no way we could do it (Josefina, Z-10, October 1994).

5.2.3 Unaffordable Farming

Rock-bottom prices in the market and lack of credit have made farming prohibitive for the majority of Nexatengo’s peasant farmers at the same time input prices have increased substantially. Don David explains:

For ourselves as producers, the problems of the countryside are the insecticides, the fertilizers, these are the greatest problems. Now the transportation costs affect us a lot, because gasoline is expensive. We have prices, I tell you, of 15 years ago. The producer prices are the same. But in inputs, well they are at today’s prices that are currently living in a crisis [...]. Before, a sack of fertilizer went for 17, 20 pesos. Now they are charging us 62. The transport costs to Mexico. They were costing us 150 pesos. Now the transport shipping fee is 600. Why? Because the toll booths in the highways are expensive. They are 120 [pesos] for a return trip, just the highway. The insecticides--the plagues have advanced in the crops a lot. For example, in the 1980s, I bought a kilo of Benlate that cost 30 pesos--it is a very good fungicide for funguses--it cost 30 pesos. Now it costs 208 pesos. So then, for us in agriculture, this is what affects us poorly. A day worker, we are giving him the minimum, 25 pesos even though we know that for them 25 pesos is also worth nothing. But we cannot pay him more because we are not profiting from anywhere to pay him (David, Z-36, April 1995).

With neither credit to make the initial investments nor prices scaled to input costs, it has been extremely difficult for ejidatarios to continue planting vegetables and flowers, and almost impossible for landless families who also run costs of land rents. Today, several

¹⁶At this time, N$ 6000 was the equivalent of approximately US $1800.
Producers in Nexatengo are investors from outside the community and it is not uncommon to find *ejidatarios* working as the foremen of these operations on their own land.

One response has been to plant alfalfa, and to a lesser extent, corn for animal feed and self-consumption. Alfalfa is a crop that is not labour intensive: one family of producers can manage their own crops without paid workers. Alfalfa farmers have several dairy cows and sell surplus alfalfa locally to other dairy farmers. These *ejidatarios* often combine alfalfa production with the rental of a small portion of their land. Milk sales have become an important income-generating strategy for most households: "Right now the cows help us if just for the weekly expenses, in order to support our children" (David, Z-36, February 1995).

Unfortunately, milk production is not an effective strategy because commercialization is so poor. Several milkmen from outside the community show up in their pick-ups twice a day to collect the milk. It is then sold in the Atlixco market for double the price paid to producers. The poor returns, however, are not the biggest problem: milkmen often do not pay producers for weeks on end, and sometimes not at all. Since there is no other choice than to let the milk go sour, producers continue to wait and trust they will be paid.

[T]he milkmen don’t pay us. Well now we told him to pay us for two weeks. But good gracious! It lasts for the food and for paying for what we borrowed to get through last week. But note that he doesn’t pay. He only gives us very little, 100 [pesos] here, 150 there, and when he owes us 900, 800? And now he has only managed to give us 300? And now what? And now with what to pay for what we planted last week? (María Elena, Z-20, May 1995)

Producers in the nearby town of Almazán have recently formed a productive association with Chamboucy—a company most famous for its yogurts. The company paid for the materials to construct a small building to house the tank for pasteurizing. This piece of equipment is on loan to the producers. When the association began in May 1995, producers had to make a small investment to enter and were receiving less money per litre.
(N$ 0.90) than the local milkmen were paying (N$ 1.00). They were always guaranteed, however, to be paid on time. Less than a year later, in April 1996, members of the association had recovered their initial investment, had bonuses awaiting them in December, and had developed credit opportunities at extremely attractive interest rates. Furthermore, the price of milk had improved. While local intermediaries were paying N$ 1.60 per litre, Chamboucy was paying N$ 2.30. The problem for Nexatengo’s milk producers, however, is how to transport the milk to Almazán. In April 1995, only two Nexatengo producers had entered the association.

Many producers continue to plant vegetables and flowers because they see no other alternative. When asked why his family continues to plant, one producer responded:

It’s a way to survive. The little milk I get from my cows serves to feed my family, and then there is the corn, beans, and vegetables from the land. It’s a method of survival. What other work am I going to get? There are no other jobs. Do you see any factories here? So I continue to plant, even though I lose out (Don Teo, Z-33, November 1994).

Planting commercial crops no longer ensures a profit, but producers continue investing, lottery-style:

You lose a lot in the countryside. I tell you it is beautiful, because the times that you profit, you profit. But when you lose, you lose [...]. It is going to be two years now that we have not taken any profits out of the fields (Ruth, Z-21, May 1995).

Always you work and you work, and you win once and lose six times (Don Alfredo, Z-31, December 1994).

But the truth is we have no other choice; you just go along, risking it, struggling (Don David, Z-36, April 1995).

One family that was interviewed claimed that they had not seen profits from their crops for several consecutive seasons but were financing their production with remittance earnings from five children working in the north.

It is likely that a great deal of crop switching will take place in the future. It is also probable that some producers may begin to plant small sections with corn and beans, if
there is sufficient family labour. The latest economic crisis of December 1994, a harsh blow to the marginalized of the rural sector, was perhaps more radically felt by those communities more dependent on a cash income to ensure their daily sustenance. Peasant families in San Miguel have their immediate consumption needs met with *milpa* agriculture. Furthermore, they respond to scarce cash resources through a diversity of established survival strategies: exploiting alternative “free” fuel sources, gathering wild foods, engaging in craft production, or co-operatively harvesting. Peasant families of Nexatengo are much more closely linked with market relations and dependent on cash flows from commercial crops to satisfy their needs:

> Life is very expensive now. For us, the peasants, it’s not good that things have risen. Now a kilo of sugar is at 3,000 [old] pesos. A kilo of soap? At 3,500. Manufactured things, all expensive. And the poor peasant, if they plant, it’s not worth anything now. Now the poor peasant invests in a few [agricultural] tasks. They run the tasks’ expenses, having to pay the tractor, the ox-driver [...]. You invest in the land and don’t profit [...] because everything is expensive [...]. Any way, the tasks are poor investments [...]. And where are we going to get money to eat? From where? [...]It’s good for he who has [money] because he comes out being able to go on eating. But for us, the poor, the peasants who don’t have [money]? (Bénita, Z-2, February 1995).

Is a return to self-sufficiency attractive to Nexatengo’s producers? An elderly *ejidataria* that has witnessed the changes in the community over time commented: “Now we think that any more of this and we can’t do it [plant market vegetables]. We will plant corn and beans. That’s how it was before, corn and beans, if just for consumption” (Elizabet, Z-1, February 1995). For most commercial producers, however, a complete transition to self-sufficient agriculture—a ‘repeasantization’ (Gates 1993)—seems unlikely. One informant described the situation as follows:

> I think that planting wheat and corn, doesn’t make ends meet at all now. Because, firstly, with vegetables, yes, it is very hard for us, but apart from this we are feeding the people we hire, the day labourers. And if we planted corn, no more than two or three people would work for us, and with that once or twice a week, during the two months that the corn grew.
But a day labourer would not be hired. Another thing: one hectare of corn, we would harvest around three tons, because this is not a corn-growing zone [...]. With the price a kilo [of corn] is at, 700 [old pesos] per kilo, it would be 2,100 pesos. From these 2,100, 500 or more goes to cultivation. Now in fertilizers, another 500. Now in order to pay the pickers that collect the cobs, another 400. We have made up the bill and we are left with nothing. To plant corn, nothing. Now with wheat, perhaps we could, but I do not even know how [to cultivate it]. But if we continue on like this, we will not be able to pay for even one of our children to learn a profession. With what? All of our products are cheap. Now if we were corn people, if we were from Sinaloa, where there is a lot of land, that each ejidatario has an area of some 40, 50 hectares of ejido, perhaps 20 of corn, 20 of wheat, and we'll see about the other ten, perhaps it could be done. But if we have three hectares, with what do we make ends meet, Karol? It is very difficult (David, Z-36, April 1995).

It is more likely that Nexatengo’s producers will continue to search for income-generating alternatives, both within agriculture (e.g. dairy production) and outside of it (e.g. proletarianization). At the present, as mentioned in previous chapters, Nexatengueños are tightening their belts: “because to eat meat three times a week or to drink milk daily, you can’t. The most you can do is buy the most economical, such as your beans, your corn, your chiles” (Juan Jóse, Z-35, December 1994).

5.3 NEW LOCAL LABOUR MARKETS AND A REDEFINED AGRICULTURAL PROLETARIAT

At the same time small scale peasant production of flowers and vegetables has been becoming increasingly difficult in Nexatengo, the large capitalist ranches—El Diamante and Girasol—have been expanding operations. Although commercial floriculture is facing severe challenges on a national scale (Lara Flores, in press), these actors are more equipped than small producers to overcome the crisis. Their businesses are large-scale, high investment operations with several hectares of greenhouses dedicated to ornamental flowers for export as well as extensive fields of open-air crops. Production is destined for both domestic and foreign markets, but profits from high quality exports usually make up the bulk of earnings. These large capitalist ranches receive special terms of credit that target export producers.
As noted throughout this thesis, national level government policies have hurt peasant producers while benefiting large operations through initiatives to promote floriculture. This dynamic sector— one of Mexico’s “comparative advantages”— holds a favoured position in an agricultural development framework that stresses the importance of agro-exports as generators of foreign exchange and investment magnets. Furthermore, the big ranches are one of the central providers of permanent rural employment—an area targeted under official rhetoric for state support. The ranches’ demands for labour are opening up at a time peasant producers are turning away from labour-intensive crops, but these demands are not being filled by the same people who are experiencing less job security. As social scientists have pointed out in other regions of Mexico, the floriculture ranches are responsible for the significant rise in female agricultural proletariats, rather than working to absorb the male day labourers who make up a large percentage of Mexicans crossing North American borders (Barrón 1991, 1993; Lara Flores, 1991; Marroni, 1993; Robles et al., 1993). This is the case for Nexatengo. Doña Josefina, whose husband was experiencing job insecurity stated:

For example, here with Bauer. He has his flower greenhouses now. And before it was just men’s work. It’s also good that there are a lot of women working there, in the greenhouses. Many women work, and before it was just men’s work [...] because there were no greenhouses. It was just pasture land, alfalfa for cows. (Z-10, November, 1994)

This section explores the labour market transitions and their implications.

5.3.1. Labour Demands and the Work Process

The neighbouring large capitalist ranches are one of the most important sources of permanent employment for agricultural proletariats in Nexatengo. Like the labour markets supplying peasant producers, the number of workers varies according to the agricultural seasons of the open-air crops. The ranches, however, have a larger permanent staff employed in the greenhouses, the packaging area, and in maintenance. This staff is almost completely female. The few males are employed as security guards, maintenance workers...
or higher-ranking field hands. Apart from their immediate usefulness, these few positions serve as a contrast to devalue the work women do--working directly with the flower--which constitutes the crux of the ranches' operations. A day labourer's description of her work in a ranch reflects this process: "We were 95% women and 5% men. Men had the hardest tasks, making boxes, packing, carrying, this was their work. The women *just* chose the flower" (Carmen, Z-12, May 1995; my italics). This depreciation of the jobs assigned to women not only justifies a depreciated wage, it hides the fact that tasks involved in greenhouse floriculture require a variety of skills and that trained workers possess an extensive knowledge of ornamental plant care. Ranches also rely on training that many women may have acquired in their gender socialization and through domestic work (Lara Flores, 1995).

Hours of work, intensity of work, and pay scales are different for each area of the ranch. For example, in the ranch Girasol, the workers in the field labour according to the established norm outside the ranch, eight hour days in a six day week. They receive the lowest weekly wage, which in April of 1995 was N$ 120 (US$ 20). This is somewhat higher than El Diamante, who pays its field workers a mere N$ 108 (US$ 18) per week. The field workers--whose work is temporary--vary in age from young girls of 15 to older women, some over 60 years of age.

The greenhouse staff at Girasol work on a quota system; after their plant maintenance tasks are done, they have a set number of roses to cut before leaving work. They usually work no more than an eight-hour day Mondays to Fridays, a four hour day Saturdays, and occasionally are called into work on Sundays. They earn a base wage of N$ 140 (US$ 24) but usually work an extra eight over-time hours, making this a more attractive job. The women in Girasol greenhouses at the time of my research were, in their majority, between the ages of 17 and 19. Most were single, unmarried young women. Those who had children were single mothers (Appendix 8).
Aside from the supervisor, the women in packaging at Girasol ranged between 17 and 28 years of age; like the greenhouse staff they were mostly single, unmarried women and the few with children were single mothers and heads of households. Workers here receive the highest wages, but they have the most arduous schedules. They work seven days a week, 365 days a year. According to one Girasol worker:

Our normal schedule is seven in the morning until four in the afternoon. But [...] since there is so much work right now, we work until seven, eight at night [...]. When there is a lot of work with the flowers, on occasion [we work] until 12 at night, from seven [a.m.] to twelve [a.m.]. When there is a lot of production, [...] because there is a lot of demand for flowers in February, is when they make us work until midnight (Claudia, Z-23, November 1994).

Women in packaging at Girasol make N$ 120 (US$ 20) a week as a base wage but earn according to the number of bouquets of roses they package. Thus their salary can as much as double, to N$ 240 (US$ 40). To double their salary, however, the women must work a double shift. These hours of work are not a matter of choice; they must work until the flowers are done or risk losing their job.

The poor pay in the floriculture ranches is rarely complemented with other worker benefits. Some of the supervisors in the ranches receive health insurance but the bulk of the staff does not. For both the workers and supervisors in Girasol at the time of research there were absolutely no benefits. There is no compensation for work missed because of illness or pregnancy. There are no vacations, no vacation pay, and no health insurance. Such a situation occurs despite the fact the work schedule is very intense--especially for those working in packaging--and implies health hazards. Workers complain that the agrochemicals and the refrigerated flower lockers cause respiratory ailments. The work implies back problems because women are bent over all day long. There are few compensatory moments to rest--workers receive an hour for lunch, and two ten-minute breaks during the day. Even when they work over-time, there are no provisions for extra breaks.
5.3.2 Gender Myths and Gender Realities

All the movements with the flower are detailed, [...] you have to treat the flower with care. Men are much rougher in their movements, in their treatment. In fact, I feel that the girls [...] are much more committed than men. The girls, in a way, feel more commitment. There are many young women with children, whose husbands have gone to the other side [U.S.], so by force, they have to bring the money home to their children [...] (Ranch owner, April 1996).

Why a feminized work force in floriculture? Supervisors at Girasol claimed that women are more tolerant of this kind of work than men: “I have fired men, they don’t tolerate much there [at the ranch]. Because this work is very absorbing, you have them very busy, we won’t say 20 hours but yes, most of the hours of the day. I think that they [the men] get bored” (Carmen, Z-12, May 1995). Men themselves claimed the low pay is their main deterrent, despite the fact ranch labour constitutes some of the only permanent agricultural work for Nexatengo and other surrounding communities. A male day labourer explained: “A woman for the little they pay her, continues working. And a man, no. A man, if you pay him little he thinks that somewhere else he can earn more, or he prefers not to work instead of working for little” (Andrés, Z-34, April 1995). He also claimed that men don’t work in the floriculture ranches:

... just to avoid being humiliated. They say because they[the ranches] pay them so little, they are humiliated, or they think that somewhere else they can earn more. Because of this sometimes they work for a while in one place, they work for awhile in another place, and not women, because when a woman sets herself to work, she sets herself to work (Andrés, Z-34, April 1995).

The ‘absorbing’ character of the work and the ‘low pay’ are two significant disincentives to men. The bottom line is that the work in the floriculture ranches has been defined female, and men prefer migration to work that has been labeled as such (Marroni, 1993). Using gender stereotypes all too familiar in these peasant communities, women are hired by the ranches on grounds that they are more “tolerant” of the working conditions and more “responsible” than men--gender myths that hide the ranches’ real demand for a
disciplined labour force. Like other capitalist operations characterized by a feminized work force, such as those serving the *maquiladores*, the floriculture ranches employ women because their subordinated status in society has made their labour cheaper and then manipulate gender stereotypes to justify their hiring practices (Fernández-Kelly, 1983, 1989; Sklair, 1989; Tiano, 1987).

For most women, working in the ranches is not about preference but about survival and limited alternatives. As has been noted in similar studies on feminized labour markets in Mexico, the wages these women are earning often do not constitute "supplementary income" but the only cash income their households have access to (Fernández-Kelly, 1983, 1989; Tiano, 1987). A supervisor in packaging at Girasol commented: "I have girls, young women, that don’t have any other responsibility than to arrive home and help their mothers. They don’t have any responsibilities and they are very responsible" (Carmen, Z-12, May 1995). Her words hide the reality that many of her staff were either single mothers supporting their children, having been abandoned by their husbands; or young unmarried women whose cash income has become essential for the survival of their families. Claudia, the woman whose narrative offers the reality beyond the text of much of this chapter claims:

> there are people that do not have enough to fill their mouths, nor anything. I can see it in this community and many more. I see the *señora* here on this side [of the house], she has four or five children. And imagine, she has to work in the fields the days she can. And she has an older daughter, she’s already a young woman. And how do they all live? On the young girl’s wage. If this girl is earning 150 pesos, how will it last for five people? For food, clothing, footwear, everything? And on top of that the medicines when someone gets sick. I don’t believe one can live like that. One cannot live like that (Z-23, April 1995).

One family, who had formerly been considered one of the most privileged and powerful families in the community, revealed in an interview that their daughter’s wage had become essential to the family budget.
The incorporation of women, especially those from low-income and landless families, in remunerated and non-remunerated agricultural production is not new in the Atlixco Valley. Rather, the feminization of floriculture production refers to the step to waged peasant work, or, the proletarianization of the female work force (Marroni 1995). The type of work women are doing and the conditions of that work in the ranches, however, are significantly different than women’s traditional paid/unpaid work with peasant producers. How is this new incorporation into the labour market—working in the ranches—affecting women’s lives?

From my observations the work in the greenhouses was an area that allowed some women to expand and improve their self-worth. Women employed in the greenhouses that I spoke to were proud of their work with ornamental plants and conscious of the skills they had acquired. One worker, who began working in the ranch El Corazón since she was 12 years old, eventually became the supervisor of orchid production. In these capacities she acquired an extensive knowledge of plant science and was responsible for key areas of the business. This informant was especially proud of her abilities because she was illiterate, having been denied an education since she began working at eight years old.

Access to a salary must also have other positive affects on women’s well-being, freeing them from complete economic dependence on their husbands or parents and improving the family’s situation in general. In the Zacapu zone in Michoacán, Mummert (1995) identifies a series of positive effects deriving from women’s incomes—the family’s well-being tends to improve; the level of education of sons and daughters increases; women achieve a greater influence over the administration of the families’ expenses; and women’s self-esteem is strengthened (González Montes and Salles, 1995). These day labourers, however, often do not have significant control of their earnings. The salary of young, unmarried women often goes directly into their mother’s pocket. For single mothers who have their children in their parents’ care, the situation is often the same.
Young women’s remunerated activities away from the domestic sphere and away from parental control makes leaving their jobs and adjusting to the marriage contract at times difficult. Young women are expected to quit their jobs when they are married:

If the wife works, people talk. They say: ‘and now this? He allowed his wife to work!’ It’s because here almost all the wives don’t work. It’s very rare that the wife manages to work. Then sometimes there are those that understand, or feel the need, and both [husband and wife] put an effort into bringing money home (Ruth, Z-21, May 1995).

The independence young women find in their work comes as a threat to their subordination within the reproduction strategy of the peasant unit, not only for the men in their lives but for their mother-in-laws. As in San Miguel, a new bride in the Atlixco Valley must assume her position after marriage as daughter-in-law in the home of her husband’s parents. Here her mobility and actions are under strict moral control and she is charged with the most arduous domestic tasks. One woman explains her story:

I liked my job very much. I always remember the work that I did. Because I loved to work with flowers [...] When I started to work, I was ten years old. At fifteen, I was managing. Why did you leave your job? To get married. Because my husband, when he was my boyfriend, didn’t want me to work. He always told me, ‘Leave your job. I don’t like it that you are working.’ But I liked my job. And I told him, ‘While I am not with you, I will continue working.’ And then I got married, and that was it! [...] At first, I missed my work a lot. Sometimes when they said: ‘You will make this for supper’--because my life changed after that, because after that my job was my chores as a housewife. So you see, I felt very awful. Because later they would say: ‘You are going to cook, you are going to this …’ And I got angry. Because I wanted to go back to my job. I would sleep and I would dream of flowers, I would dream of myself amidst the flowers [...] But later I started getting used to it, and two years later this child [indicating] came, and after that I devoted myself to the child. And with more time I began forgetting about my job. And until now, do you believe that at times I still feel like I want to return to work. But I can’t now because it doesn’t please my husband [...]. He is very jealous and he doesn’t want me to work. Later we talk and I say, ‘Listen, they are a lot of jobs that I know how to do, I can find work easily’ ‘NO. You are in the house with the children. You should not work. The obligation to work is mine, not yours [...]’. [The obligation] of working is his, he says. It is his to
work and to bring money home. And I should not work, I should be in charge of the children (Ruth, Z-21, May 1995, my emphasis).

For many women, working in the ranches is an escape. Physically leaving the house allowed them some distraction from their domestic problems:

When I started working, it was a time in which we had a lot of problems in our family. And when I started working, I felt distracted, more than anything. Apart from the work, I felt like I was distracted, perhaps by talking with the young women, chatting. I was very content [...] Although I had to get up very early to prepare breakfast, to get myself up, to leave something so my children ate; even so I liked my job (Rosa, Z-22, April 1995).

For younger women, it often means exemption from the daily routine of household chores. This burden, however, then shifts to other women in the household, on to older women or to younger female siblings.

Working in the ranches may offer women a measure of independence or distraction, but it comes at a high physical and mental cost. The health costs, as mentioned previously, are great: respiratory ailments due to constant exposure to refrigerated lockers; back problems due to long hours standing bent over in the same position; various complications caused by continuous contact with agrochemicals; and a host of visual and mental maladies due to hours of work that demand a high level of concentration and dexterity. As one woman in packaging put it, employees tolerate poor working conditions and miserable wages:

... out of the necessity that one has for the job. Yes, at times one accepts abuses and everything [...] I have always said this: every worker works out of necessity. No one works for pleasure. More than anything, at times you have needs, the same needs that makes you as a worker remain silent in everything. In everything, you accept working conditions, but out of the same need that you have for the job (Claudia, Z-23, November 1994).

Furthermore, the hours of work described, with shifts up to 17 hours long, are extremely physically exhausting. Women who work in the fields have always had a heavier work load than their male counterparts, owing to their domestic responsibilities:
The women day labourers have more work than the men. For example, because the women get up at four thirty in the morning in order to take their nixtomaal to the mill, to make their tortillas, to make breakfast. There are some that have to take their little children to primary school, and to send food for their children. They go to the fields, at eight in the morning they have to present themselves with the person that has contracted them to work. From there they go to work. At one in the afternoon they eat, they take tortillas to eat. At two in the afternoon they return to work. At six they get off work. They arrive at their house to make supper or do one of their chores that is pending so that the next day they won’t have even more work. They have a little more work than men. Because the men are peones too, right? But they get up and because they have their women: [imitating a masculine voice] ‘Well, I get up and my wife makes breakfast, and the kids go to school’. She has to make tortillas [lunch] for herself, and tortillas for her husband who also goes to work. In the afternoon, they both get back, the woman peon and the man peon, but he arrives and rests, and the señora no, because she has to make supper and wash the dishes, and feed everyone. Well, women work more. And also, their Sundays are reserved for washing clothes (Cony, Z-4, February 1995).

If this is the situation for a traditional day labourer, it is probable that women employed by the ranches (longer hours; less flexibility for absences) have a more difficult time balancing these responsibilities.

Not only do the long hours take a great physical toll on women, they disrupt their personal lives. The only married woman in the Girasol ranch at the time of my research, claimed her work schedule caused friction with her husband:

Sometimes I noticed that he was in despair because he left his work early and I left mine always late, always, always late. In fact, we have left as late as 12 at night. This is why sometimes he was bothered by it. Because he arrived at four, at six in the afternoon, and I arrived much later than him. This was the problem. But it wasn’t precisely that I worked [...]. Here in the towns around here, if the husband and the wife work, well it looks bad to other couples. But we talked about it before I decided to work. Because unfortunately, what he was earning was not enough (Carmen, Z-12, May 1995).

Women often do not have a lot of time to spend with their children. One older woman explained her relationship with her grand-daughter when her daughter-in-law was forced to find paid work:
Now I have the girl [at home], but she is my granddaughter, she isn’t mine. But it is almost like she is mine, because I raised her. Her mother went to work and they left her with me, at age one and a half years. So then I looked after her, I put her to sleep, and all that [...]. [Her mother] returned at 10, 11 at night [...] so I put the girl to bed until she arrived, and then she slept with her. But I almost always raised her (Julia, Z-5, May 1995).

As the passage suggests, the responsibilities of childcare are often are borne by ranch workers’ mothers, mother-in-laws, and sisters.

5.3.3 Tolerance/Resistance

Organized resistance by the day labourers in the ranches is a possibility, although an unlikely one at the moment. Based on observations of the labour market serving small producers, there is no history of worker organization, so workers serving the ranches cannot draw upon this experience. This lack of organization may be explained partly by the characteristics of the work with peasant producers. Boundaries between producer/worker are very fluid, due to the well-entrenched patterns of share-cropping and rental agreements. Therefore many families who work as day labourers have also been employers of day labourers. Several producers have their sons and daughters working el jornal or may have even hired their sons or sons-in-law. Furthermore, an individual small producer only has a temporary labour demand. Since within the ranches the distinctions between employers and employees are emphasized and the identity of the employer is constant with permanent work, perhaps this will provide the structural capabilities for worker organization. There has only been one case of organized resistance, when the staff of one greenhouse refused to work one Mother’s Day and ‘walked out’ on their jobs. The fact that the women never ‘walked back’ to make their demands puts into question the long-term effectiveness of the action. Although a new staff had to be re-trained, the conditions of work did not change.

The economic need women have for these jobs has become their greatest impediment in organizing. When the ranch El Corazón went bankrupt after a changing of management (father-to-son), many of the day labourers continued to work there for 17
weeks--without pay--in hopes that their cheques would some day come through. One
women in packaging related a story in which tried unsuccessfully to organize a walk-out
when a new administrator intensified the work pace by increasing expected output without
a corresponding increase in the women's salary:

We agreed not to go to work the next day. And what happens? The next
day, I don't go to work, and they go. And I say, 'what's going on? Didn't
we agree on not going?' And she says, 'Listen, I need the job'. And I said
'Listen. We all need the job. I don't work for pleasure. I work because I
need to, I have to support my children. But if you don't stand firm, that is,
if you just think about yourself, they will never do anything for us. And she
says, 'But the truth is I need the job and I am going to work' [...] I left the
job, and I was working somewhere else, and in the end I returned to work
here, because it is close by (Claudia, Z-23, May 1995).

Another worker claimed that the women working in one of the greenhouse made a typed
list of their complaints and demands. When it came time to sign, the workers who had
originally agreed on the plan abandoned it.

Employers rely on these workers' desperation to hold on to their jobs as a result of
their marginalization as peasants, as the landless, and especially as women. Losing their
job is very threatening to them, especially with rising unemployment in all sectors of the
Mexican economy. This fear is manipulated by employers who: "start distinguishing a
person. And say: 'She is the one that talks the most. We have to fire her, immediately."
(Claudia, Z-23, November 1994). Such fears are well-founded. In Nexatengo, women are
confined to limited employment opportunities. Domestic work pays less than the ranches,
requires women to leave their home communities, and is rarely a viable alternative for
women with children. Women with heavy domestic responsibilities sell goods in the
Atlixco market or home-made snacks in front of schools. Although women have been
petty vendors in this zone since pre-Conquest times, there are still severe restrictions on
women's mobility. Reprisals range from women being stigmatized within the community
to physical abuse by their male partners. Because the ranches are close by, women avoid
problems of restricted mobility and do not have to waste their wages on transport fees.
The situation in the ranches for workers is not likely to improve in the near future, considering that even the largest floriculture enterprises are also experiencing a crisis (Lara Flores, 1995). Research in the State of Mexico demonstrates that floriculture ranches have had to execute a profound reorganization in their operative schemes (Lara Flores, 1995). This restructuring has found its key strategy to be the reduction of the number of workers and further restrictions on existing salaries and benefits. In Nexatengo, those ranches reliant on credit suffered a financial setback after the currency devaluation in December 1994. One ranch owner explained that although the devaluation meant that export production reaped higher profits, production could not expand because high domestic interest rates prohibit investing to build more greenhouses. An engineer outlines some of the difficulties:

With the crisis the amount to be paid in credit doubled, which is one of the principal problems to have. The other, is that the interest rates are very high, too high. The inputs, because of the devaluation there was inflation in everything needed for production. And the other, really to sell on the national market? It does respond [...] It is not attractive to buy flowers in a time of crisis (May 1996)

Such pressures have made the ranches look to cut their labour costs in order to keep afloat. In Nexatengo, the ranches failed to complement the wage increase set down by law in April following the December devaluation. Packagers in Girasol finally received a raise in May 1996, but their work load also increased, leaving workers feeling it was no raise at all. They were also denied their 1995 Christmas bonus:

They never paid us a Christmas bonus again in December [...]. And then [the owner] says to the forewoman to control us [...] ‘Control your girls, because they are the ones that always, always, reject everything.’ And I say, ‘We are fighting for something that we feel we’ve earned. The Christmas bonus is by law, not because they want to give it us or not [...] Listen, we are slaves! (Claudia, Z-23, May 1996).

When talking about the crisis unleashed by the devaluation, one owner complained to have problems understanding workers’ complaints about insufficient pay when the worries
facing the business were 'greater': 'I have these women asking for raise increases, always! [...] They do not understand the stress I am under. I could lose the family inheritance!' (May. 1996).

The floriculture ranches, however, will most likely survive the crisis, owing to the emphasis of Mexico’s development model on agro-exports and their purported benefits. The desperation of workers experiencing a crisis-riddled economy comes as a benefit to employers seeking to remain competitive in a global arena by further restricting the rights of their already ‘cheapened’ labour force. Like Arizpe and Aranda’s study 1981 study of the feminized workforce in the strawberry fields of Michoacán, women’s comparative disadvantages are the cornerstones of agricultural operations in the Atlixco Valley and an integral component of to global capitalist restructuring.

Fig.5.8 The greenhouses of Girasol

5.4 INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MARKETS: NEXATENGANS IN NEW YORK

One of the most significant transitions that the community of Nexatengo is experiencing is the participation of their youth in foreign labour markets, with the
development of international migration networks. This phenomenon was practically non-existent until the early 1980s. Although the community has experienced demographic growth, most families claim that the crises of the 1980s—rather than a restricted land base or declining job opportunities—were the factors that have pushed their family members to seek employment in the North. Despite the risks migration involves and the fact that migrants will fill the lowest ranking jobs on U.S. labour market occupational hierarchy, Nexatengans earn more in a week washing dishes in New York than they do in a month working in the fields or greenhouses of the Atlixco Valley. These migration patterns are also becoming more entrenched as the networks become further established and as the new livelihoods take on a greater influence in their daily lives.

As demonstrated in the preceding chapter on San Miguel, gender relations inscribe Nexatengo’s entrance into international labour markets and the implications taking place in the community as a result of this phenomenon. This section dates the migration process, explores people’s explanations of the upsurge in migration, and examines the effects it is having in the community.

5.4.1 Pushes and Pulls

The first person to leave Nexatengo was a landless labourer who was contracted to work in the grape orchards in California. His example did not become a generalized trend for others in the community until he left California and began working in New York.

He was the first that went. It’s just been ten years now that the people leave and leave. But he left in the seventies, and no one, no one else went [...] Now many people have gone; it’s been just since ‘85. One began to go, and later another, and so on. And because now they are there, they come back to take their brothers, uncles, or whoever [...] Well now many people leave, later their wives leave and everyone, but just youths. (Eugenia, Z-4, December 1994).17

17Marroni writes: “In the Atlixco Valley communities, migration networks began to form with the Bracero Program (1942-1964). In the 1980s, demographic pressure on the land made agricultural exploitation as the basis of reproduction an impossibility for all peasant families. At the same time, in certain communities an agriculture was consolidated whose surplus could not be applied in the short term to
The destination of the migration wave that began in the early 1980s has been New York, although many first go to Los Angeles. Indeed, for the Atlaxco zone, New York has been the principal destination for migrants. The predominant occupation for most Nexatengueños in New York has been restaurant work; washing dishes or bussing tables. Others work driving cabs and some have even become coyotes or polleros. Living situations are far from comfortable and hardly private; migrants usually live two to three to a bedroom to keep rental costs down.

**Fig. 5.9 A revealing license plate: New York**

Most people claim the crisis is responsible for out-migration: “it started around ’85 or ’88 because of the same crisis” (David, Z-34, April 1995). The following texts explain:

[My husband] stopped planting epazote because sometimes the prices didn’t give any [profit], they didn’t help him. Instead of profiting, people spend all their money and there’s nothing left. From that harvest, he didn’t earn more. On the contrary, he lost everything and there was no money to work what he had planted. Well because of this he has to emigrate to the other side. And he left (Cony, Z-24, November 1995).

productive activities. Under these conditions, the prospect of migration to the United States appeared more and more as an option” (1995:141, my translation).
[He left] because we had this debt of money that we owed; that is, the harvest did not respond. He planted onions, cilantro, and that. And they didn’t respond and he became indebted, he asked for borrowed money thinking that with the harvest he would pay. The crops did not respond and he became indebted. At that time it was 25,000 pesos. It was a lot of money. So then he says, I am not going to pay it. How am I going to pay it here? And I said, ‘Well, working’. And he said, ‘No, I’ll continue to be indebted even more’ (María Elena, Z-20, May 1995).

Six years ago, more or less, is when [...] almost the majority of people were leaving [...] . It’s for the money. Because I have noticed the instances where someone comes up and talks about it to another person, and anyone gets excited to go away, knowing that here, no se puede. Sometimes the work is running out, and they say, ‘I prefer to leave.’ And like so, many people leave. Because here you don’t make anything (Andrés, Z-34, April 1995).

The obvious factor of a declining land base due to demographic pressures and challenges to peasant production of commercial crops that have accompanied Mexico’s economic liberalization have combined to push many of Nexatengo’s residents into international migration circuits.

Although migration is relatively nascent in Nexatengo, it is becoming well-entrenched as many people have begun to prefer the risks its involves rather that “earning a misery” doing field labour.

Many say, “It’s good over there, let’s go!” Because the money from there yields more. In a week, for example, one earns some ... let’s say, one hundred dollars a week. Here that’s 300 pesos. Well here in a week a peon earns one hundred and fourteen [pesos]. And that isn’t sufficient (Cony, Z-24, November 1994).

Some eight years ago ... no, less ... some five years ago is when people began to leave. Because some realized that it was better there, that you earn more, and the truth is, that’s how it is. Here, to buy a tractor? No! It is a small miracle to be able to buy a tractor. It’s tough. However, those who have gone have made their homes and their families have a bit (Don Alfredo, Z-31, February 1995).

I want to emigrate to the United States, because each time the crisis here in Mexico is even more difficult. Each time the situation is more difficult for a person [...]. I think that I am working, and I work and I work and I don’t
see a thing. I swear that I don't, not a thing. Each time I tire more, each time it's less I earn. I can say that I earn less for the inflation right now (Claudia, Z-23, April 1995).

For those who have been to the North, readjusting to the poor wages in the countryside is almost impossible. One woman explains her husbands' decision to migrate and his motivation for doing so:

We had onions and cilantro planted. Then we didn't have enough [to pay] the *peones*, and he asked for a loan to weed [the crops], because they had weeds [...]. But then they sold the onions, but cheap. I think half were thrown out. So what happened is that nothing was earned and because of it he preferred to go away in order to pay the money. Because here they lend but later you have to pay interest, and goes along increasing [...] Because of this he had to go away. If not, he would not have gone. He left, and he was there five months. And then he came and we paid that money. Again he says, 'I am going away again, in order to have another cent more.' And he leaves. But he became sick. He just went for three months. So he came back, and he didn't pay his debt, the one for passing him over as a wetback. They have to pay there. So they lent [money] to him, but he didn't pay it, then they sent him home because he became sick. Then he says, 'that money I will not pay back here. Here they pay you so cheaply. Here you earn very little.' He says 'I am going away again.' He left, and he was there for a year. But he paid the money and he sent money here for us so that we would eat, so that we would buy clothes. But he didn't know that I was selling tortillas and that sometimes I also went to the school to sell. I took sandwiches, *chicharrines*¹⁸, whatever. I would go to sell and from that I went taking out so the children could eat [...] And when he came he said, 'I am coming, but I am not bringing a lot of money.' And I said, 'come I tell you, come!' And he came and again he said that he was going to go. He says, 'I am going because here one earns little, and I am used to it there. Why am I going to do day labour if I don't like it.' And I say 'No, buy yourself two or three cows.' And he says 'With what money? We don't have enough.' This is when I say, 'No it's because in such-and-such place I have money. It is saved because it is gaining interest, but I cannot take it out because I put it as a term deposit.' [...] So when it finished its term we went and took it out. We bought two cows and made a stable and he didn't leave anymore. [...] He hasn't gone now for five years. He doesn't go away anymore now (María Elena, Z-20, May 1995).

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¹⁸ A industrial produced snack made of flour that imitates *chicharrones* (pork cracklings).
As María Elena explains, her husband did not want to stop migrating--despite experiencing hardships in the North--until they were able to be 'self-employed' and subsist off the small profits derived from milk sales.

Many people I spoke to complained, like María Elena, that severe cases of debt were the original reasons their husbands or sons left for the north. Although most migrants were landless producers, a young *ejidatario* expressed that even he was seriously thinking of leaving due to lack of profitable alternatives. Migrant remittances are playing an important role for many families still engaged in commercial agriculture. As noted earlier, one family claimed to have not profited, more that breaking even, for several consecutive seasons from their crops. Remittances have also financed the shift to dairy production for some families. For landless families, remittances have allowed them to finance improvements to their dwellings, such as the construction of a drinking wells; added rooms to the house; or the installment of latrines. At the present, migrants have not pooled their money for large public projects for the benefit of community as has occurred in San Miguel.

5.4.2 Migration in Nexatengo: A Gendered Survival Strategy

As mentioned in previous chapters, migration in Mexico remains predominantly a male survival strategy. That is, it is a strategy women do not exercise nor have control of; they are residual beneficiaries. The majority of youths in the United States from Nexatengo are men. When one woman was justifying the ranches’ preference for a female dominated staff, she said:

I believe that it is just because in this zone many men prefer to leave for the north, the United States, and just because of this there are many single women. Here in Nexatengo, there are also 70 percent women and 30 percent men. If you do a [...] census, you will find there are many, many women alone. And the majority here are women, well you won’t even find many men (Claudia, Z-23, November 1994).
Like San Miguel, single women rarely migrate unless their fathers are already working there. Women with children, who are separated or who have been abandoned by their husbands have difficulties migrating, even when they want to:

There are women that leave [...]. Many times I have thought of going. Sometimes I say, ‘yes, I’m going’. But if I go, who knows who will take of my children? In my case, I have my children. My children are little, who else will care for them, if I’m not here? Sometimes I chastise them, sometimes I hit them, but I am their mother and I have to take care of them [...] This is the problem I have. More than three times I have said ‘I’m going, I’m going!’ but I’m still here. Sometimes I think the same way: if I go far away, I can look for some benefit for my family, so that my children live a little better, that is, so that we live a little better (Claudia, Z-23, November 1994).

Most married men leave their wives in the custody of her in-laws, or sometimes, her parents. Absences cause a great degree of strain on the relationship, as was noted in San Miguel, and often leads to desertion. Claudia states: “Everyday more people flee from the country. [...] Right now the Municipal Inspector speaks of the ‘abandoned women.’ Yes, abandoned, but why? Because the same government makes it so their husbands go away and leave them abandoned” (Z-23, April 1995). Another woman claimed that “There are many that abandon them [their wives] and look for other ones up there. And the poor things stay here” (Eugenia, Z-5, April 1995). In the case of one woman, four months after she was married, her husband resumed his work in New York, where (as she much later discovered) he was self-employed making mica chueca (false documents) for immigrants. Their marriage consisted of one month visits twice a year (more frequent than most couples owing to the higher income provided by his profession). Once when she attempted to contact him when their child fell ill, she discovered he had another wife in New York. It turned out to be a discovery for the other woman as well, who in her rage consequently reported the man’s activities to American authorities, and he was arrested. The woman from Nexatengo considers herself ‘divorced’, but claims she is also (socially) prohibited by her family to enter into future relationships with men.
Some married couples elect to take the wife along. For those with children, the burden of childcare is then often shifted on to their mothers or mothers-in-law: “Many women leave, and the men leave, and who remains? The mother, in order to care of the children” (Mariana, Z-3, May 1995). Another woman explained situations of entire families resettling in New York and the effects she saw in the community:

So many people from here are up there, entire families that go completely. There are many that go, leave their children here, and --for example, I have a half sister that also went. She will have been there five years in January. And imagine, they already forgot about their children completely. My poor mother is now old and she is going around supporting the family. There are 4 [children]. When she left, her oldest son was in the first grade and now he finished sixth grade (Josefina, Z-10, November 1995).

When I interviewed Josefina’s mother she told me: “Since my daughter left me five years ago, now I can’t do anything, because she left me the children. Because all the money I have is for food, in order to eat. When she sends me [money] I put it towards food as well.” (Bénita, Z-2, December 1995). Bénita was an ejidataria in her sixties, who had been renting her ejido plot for several years since she did not have any family labour to pool from nor the capital resources. According to her, her daughter left because she had fallen into debt during her position as the administrator of the local CONASUPO store. Bénita had to become a day labourer because her daughter rarely sent her enough remittances to raise the four children left behind.

Several women in Nexatengo desire to head north rather than work in the ranches, especially those who are heads of households. One woman, who worked in packaging, on the verge of leaving commented:

[S]ometimes I work--get this--two shifts. I go in at six in the morning and I leave at 10, 11 at night. Imagine, two shifts. And I am working here and I am earning a misery. Better that I go there, and there I think I could work the same amount of time and perhaps earn more [...] one is risking it, possibly as far as losing one’s life, but when there is no other alternative?
To reiterate the points made in the previous chapter, women's experiences as migrants face completely different challenges and realities. Nexatengo is no exception, and many women here see migration as a last resort.

Although a deeper exploration of expanding migratory patterns in formerly privileged peasant communities like Nexatengo is warranted, the research undertaken for this thesis reinforced findings of the implications of migration in other rural communities, in particular its gendered outcomes. What makes the context interesting for communities like Nexatengo is the degree migration will affect land tenancy in the region, especially in the wake of the agrarian reform law.

5.5 LAND OWNERSHIP, CRISIS, AND THE REFORMED ARTICLE 27

One of the areas most deserving of further research in the Atlixco Valley zone is the changes the agrarian reform law is generating in land tenancy, especially because this zone had such a dynamic land market before the reforms went into effect. The ejido of Nexatengo may be vulnerable in this new stage of privatization considering its history of rental and sharecropping arrangements, the high quality of the land, its irrigation, and its proximity to the Puebla-Mexico City highway. Another vulnerability factor is a complete lack of understanding of the reforms. Will Nexatengo’s ejidatarios begin to sell their share of revolutionary patrimony? Who will be among the first to sell?

One area that has certainly been transformed is the group of actors investing in cultivating Nexatengo’s land. As noted, unreliable profits and scarce credit has made it extremely difficult for ejidatarios to make the heavy investments vegetables and flowers require, and almost impossible for landless families who also run costs of land rents. The circle of ejidatarios that rent their land because they do not have the labour nor the capital resources is widening. One ejidataria explains at length:

Sometimes out of necessity you put the land up [for rent]. Sometimes they say that truly the life of a peasant is sad. Sometimes I start to think why I don’t plant and I say ‘I am a woman and I don’t plant.’ But others, I see that they are men and they also have all their lands rented [...] With this I
can accept it sometimes, because well, I am a woman and many of us are *ejidatarias* and [...] we don’t plant. But the men! Well almost they too, have rented. *And why do they all want to rent?* For the same reason that the earnings from crops no longer help out [...]. Almost since 1993 until now, you can no longer earn a living through farming [...]. *What is a crop worth if the onion or the cilantro fields are going to stay there, thrown out [...].* Now it can’t be done, I say. It can’t be done now. Because of this, its better to rent (Margarita, Z-6, June 1995).

Now not only women are those marginalized from the productive process but most peasant producers.

Will rental arrangements eventually become land sales? At the present, the *ejido* of Nexatengo has 27 members listed with rights as *ejidatarios*. This may not reflect the true number of holders of *ejido* land. The *Ejido* Commissariat claims that the original three hectare plots have not been divided up, as is the case in San Miguel. Based on observations, this did not seem to be the case in practice. Many families had divided the lots among their children. The community is presently going through the land regularization process (PROCEDE), which may reveal a greater number of owners of *ejido* land. Although the land is often divided up among the children of a deceased *ejidatario*, the *ejido* leadership maintains that only one of those people may be designated to hold full rights as an *ejidatario*, the others being merely *posesionarios* (land holders). This has maintained a degree of joint farming of the three has, in many cases, although there were also cases of land disputes within families.

Gender influences how property rights are exercised and will thus definitely inscribe situations under the new reformed law. Among the 27 *ejidatarios* listed to date, half are women. Many of these women are *ejidatarias* by default and in name only--aging widows who can no longer farm the parcel themselves. Some have passed the management of the *ejido* on to one of their children, while others give it up for rent. As explained in Chapter 2, even in cases when young women become *ejidatarias*, the *ejido* and matters surrounding are considered the domain of the husbands; “women do not have real prerogatives in the exercise of property rights when it has been formally assigned to
them.” (Marroni 1995:142). For example, Doña Amelia received her father’s ejido at age 14 when she married. He had died when she was quite young and had designated her as the beneficiary: she was an only child and her mother was ill. However, when she was married, Amelia and her new husband did not go to live on her ejido. Following patrilocal patterns of residence, they lived with her in-laws. Even when they formed a nuclear domestic unit, it was on a small piece of her in-laws’ land--her husband’s parcel--rather than on her large, empty, 0.5 hectare plot. Thus rather than enjoying her rights as ejidataria, Amelia took on the role of serving her in-laws.

In Nexatengo, women may be ejidatarios in name, but their husbands are responsible for fulfilling the obligations (cargos) of the ejido: attending assemblies, fulfilling three-year leadership positions, participating in community work projects. In Doña Amelia’s case, however, her husband was an alcoholic and these responsibilities were demanded of her. At one point she was part of the ejido leadership, along with her husband’s aunt and another woman. Although she claims to have benefited from the experience, she explained that her life became much more complicated, and that she was not interested in doing it again. It was a tremendous strain on her time, combining her domestic duties with the responsibility of the parcel as well as her public post. It also caused friction (involving abuse) with her husband when trips to agrarian institutions in Puebla on behalf of the ejido ran late: “[my husband] got mad when I was late, but I said, ‘I am just out with your aunt!’ We were three women and one man who is half-family [...]” (Z-13, April 1995). Although in her opinion more had been accomplished in the three years of female leadership than the entire history of the ejido, she expressed that effective leadership is easier for men because “they have more liberty to go out. Because you do, you do go out, but it’s not the same. Because a man says, [with anger] ‘Why are you just arriving now?! and for whatever little thing, you are arguing!'” (Z-13, April 1995). In Amelia’s case, domestic constraints on her time and her partner’s attempts to control her were confining factors to her participation in ejido leadership. Considering the
obstacles women face exercising their ‘package of rights’ as *ejidatarias* that derive from
the subordination of their gender, it is no surprise that the first (illegal) land sale that has
occurred in the community was executed by a woman in May of 1995.¹⁹

Doña Margarita inherited her father’s *ejido* plot when she was in her late thirties.
As the eldest daughter of a son-less couple, she always made sure to look out for her
parents even when she went to live in her husbands’ village. When they became too old to
farm, her father passed his rights as *ejidatario* to her, and she returned to Nexatengo.
Unfortunately, like Doña Amelia, her husband became an alcoholic and she became solely
responsible for supporting her children and parents. Doña Margarita was able to manage
this situation, but as the crisis becomes exceedingly felt in her own household, she began
looking to other channels for assistance. She explains why she decided to sell half of her
*ejido* to another *ejidatario* from Nexatengo:

I sold [my *ejido*], I tell you, since my sister got very sick. And well, since
my father’s *ejido* was left to me, then she said to me, ‘I am truly sick’ she
says, ‘I want you to help me.’ Then, as you know, there is no longer any
help from the crops. There is no help. Due to pure luck, I planted recently.
But again the onions stayed there, thrown out. It is like you cannot have
possibilities in farming [...]. So I said to my mother, ‘Do you know what?
I am going to obtain money in order to cure her.’ So I got the money, and
it was with interest. And here interest is like some say, ‘interests
consumes’, and I obtained it at 15% [...]. Then it rose, and I couldn’t pay it
[... ] and here this man that I had sharecropped my fields with said that
really, the crops just don’t help anymore: ‘Well then, you let me know [if
you will sell].’ So then I cheered up, and he said ‘Now do you want to?’
And it is really prohibited to sell, no? It is prohibited. And he said, ‘It is
simply a transfer, like they transfer [urban land] to others. In the papers
they put it as a transfer. So he says to me, ‘Do you want to? I will help
you, but at any rate half of your *ejido* stays with me. And as you know,
sometimes out of necessity you just can’t [keep your land], even despite
how much you want to. You say, ‘I won’t do it.’ but your necessity
demands it. [...] And I said to my sister, ‘What do you say? Do I do it or

¹⁹The first illegal land sale occurred approximately 15 years ago when an unmarried *ejidatario* with no
heirs was dying. He sold his land to the young son of one of the most powerful *ejidatarios* in the
community, Don Tomas. The sale resulted in a community uproar, with claims that the son was a
‘prestanombre’ and that Don Tomas was now the owner of two *ejidos*, an illegality. The matter
eventually calmed down, and Don Tomas (and son) were allowed to keep their second *ejido*. 

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don't I do it?' And she says, 'You decide. But really, if they come to collect and you can't [pay] ...' And would you believe such a thing that now, of the two million [old pesos] that I borrowed, the doctor charged us all of it? [...] Like that, the two million went. For the two million do you know how much I paid in interest? Almost triple. In just six months that I didn't pay the interest [...] And because of this I sold the land (Z-6, June 1995).

This interview extract reveals how easily land sales may occur when an incident (in this case a family illness) upsets the delicate balance of resources in those households where daily subsistence is precarious.

Doña Margarita had no protection for what later happened to her. She explains that the payment for the land ($N 55,000 or less than US$ 10,000):

wasn't much, it was little [...] He also paid me in bits, he didn't pay me it all together. [...] Later we really had problems between him and I. We had problems because I told him to pay me altogether and he said he had no money. [...] Then he gave me a tractor. And he priced it expensively, because I resold it and it wasn't worth that (Z-6, June 1995).

There was no regulation of the sale because it was illegal. This ejido has not finished the land regularization process nor legally privatized their land. Both parties involved did not consult with the Ejido Commissariat or the vigilance committee. When I interviewed the Ejido Commissariat, he said that he counseled Doña Margarita not to sell and expressed his disapproval with her decision, but that the matter was ultimately in her hands. The Ejido Commissariat, unlike the one in San Miguel, had not read any of the documents that have accompanied the reforms to Article 27 and expressed a complete lack of understanding of the PROCEDE process. When I asked why the ejido had decided to participate in PROCEDE, he responded: "Well this is what, frankly, we don't understand. Because many people say if we didn't do it, afterwards it would be hard to do. And now there is a program that many can take advantage of, a program that is free" (November 1994). The Ejido Commissariat did not take an aggressive position to the violation of agrarian law, nor did Doña Margarita heed his counseling. When asked about their exchanges concerning the matter, she claimed: "No one has ever been concerned about the
situation of my family, why should they care now, now that I have to sell my ejido?" (Z-6, June 1995).

Is Doña Margarita's case an indication of future land transactions? Although many communities have not completed the PROCEDE process, nor have an understanding of the legal steps they must follow before privatizing their land, has the idea of being permitted to sell ejido land been circulated throughout the countryside? Or are the effects of the crisis on the household and commercially-oriented peasant production forcing ejidatarios into land sales? In this case, perhaps the decision to sell was based on a combination of these and other factors. What is clear from this example is that although legally, peasants must jump a series of legal hoops in order to buy and sell their ejido land, in practice these steps may be disregarded.

Encroachment by the neighbouring ranches on ejido land is unlikely at present, since each ejidatario's 3 hectare are dispersed in small 0.5-1.0 hectare plots throughout the ejido. Should land sales occur, the most potential buyers will be the ejidatarios themselves, as richer peasants buy out their poorer neighbours (as exemplified in the mentioned case). Land sales may occur much more rapidly than in San Miguel, owing to the commercial value of the land and the social differentiation among ejidatarios. And as opposed to the situation in San Miguel, these peasants have more income sources necessary for land purchases. Furthermore, less-endowed ejidatarios may also use their parcels as collateral to borrow money from lending institutions or the community's infamous and ruthless moneylenders in order to finance a commercial crop. The common scenario of crop failure may cause land to change hands quickly. The most immediate changes that the regularization process will first set in motion is land fragmentation of the current 3 hectare holdings as elderly parents grant their children separate portions or name

20Goldring (1996) notes that in Zamora, Michoacán, the possibility of privately owning ejido land has already stimulated land sales and also cites Nuijten (1994) and various in ERRP (1994).

21On my last visit to the research site in May 1996, ejidatarios related to me they were interested in selling parts of their ejido plots for a mere US$ 5.00 per square metre.
multiple successors. Already feuds over the land have resulted in deaths in a neighbouring ejido where two older brothers murdered their sibling heir: “Here [...] between families, they want to kill each other, and all because of inheritance, because their parents didn’t leave [the papers] done well” (Josefina, Z-10, November 1994).

As noted in other chapters, feminist scholars have questioned the degree of women’s participation in decisions to sell the land in situations where their husbands are the ejidatarios. This section proves that even women with property rights in their own name may be the first deciding to sell, further upsetting the gender inequalities of land tenancy in rural Mexico.

5.6 FINAL REFLECTIONS

In Nexatengo, the implications of the neoliberal development model cannot be seen in isolation from gender relations. Here the agricultural crises and demographic pressures are being exacerbated by the recent anti-peasant ‘modernization’ policies. Small-scale commercial farming, considered a more profitable route of agriculture by the agrarian bureaucracy, has proved to be anything but viable. Life has become more precarious and land ownership less of a security. Those who will find themselves in situations of forced sales will most likely be the most marginalized producers and those less able to exercise their full ejido rights--categories women fall into much more commonly than men. Peasant households have been forced to find alternatives in order to ensure the reproduction of their households both within agriculture as producers switch production to less capital intensive, less labour intensive crops, and outside of it, as households send more of their members into local and international labour markets. These radical transitions to this community’s livelihoods have generally meant more local opportunities for women, as dynamic sectors of capitalist agriculture are demanding a “female” proletariat in a bid to keep labour costs at a minimum. Conversely, the crisis has implied more international opportunities for men, as capital operating in North America also demands cheap labour. In many cases, migration has meant a household’s survival; but in
those cases of women who have been abandoned, they have been left even more marginalized than before, especially those with children. From the texts quoted in this chapter, it appears that the outcomes of the neoliberal project for the community of Nexatengo have not held positive consequences, and that women in particular have witnessed their lives become more precarious.
Now this Ernesto Zedillo came in and destroyed us even more. Mexico asks for a loan from the United States. It's like us, when we ask for a loan from a rich man [...] but then we don’t have anything to pay him, and we say: ‘Well I'll give you this item, take it for the interest charges, take this other thing I have ...’ and I never pay the money but am without my things. Like so, Ernesto Zedillo and Carlos Salinas asked for money from the north, the United States, but since they don’t have anything to pay the interest with and they don’t have anything to pay the money with, well they pay with oil, they pay with the banks, with whatever, and the principal remains. They only pay the interest charges. So those who are screwed are the poor, because the rich man is rich and knows how to get the most out of the game, and the poor are dying of hunger [...]. The government should treat us as if we were its sons and daughters. ‘I am going to do this and I am going to do that, so that they do not need anything. So they are not rich, but neither are they poor, so they live a comfortable life but not of luxury, just with the basic necessities.’ With the basic necessities, and earning a wage fixed to the prices of goods. [...] But the government cannot see this. The government [members] see that their own families get rich while the rest die of hunger [...] They are the government and we are some people that are not worth anything to them (María Elena, Z-20, May 1995).

The radical and sweeping application of neoliberal reform in Mexico has resulted in the further immiseration of peasant communities and the deepening of social polarization in the countryside, among regions, producers, men and women. National statistics of growing rural poverty and news reports of congested immigration networks are slowly being complemented by ethnographic research of community level implications and responses. This thesis has provided sketches of rural women’s lived experiences in southern Puebla during recent economic restructuring. The contrast of San Miguel Acuxcomac, a subsistence agriculture community, with Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo, geared to commercial production, illustrates the diverse challenges currently facing the peasant sector. Furthermore, it provides some concrete manifestations of the feminization of poverty, citing paternal abandonment, women’s involvement in remunerated and non-
remunerated agricultural labour, domestic burdens under crisis economizing, and women’s loss of property rights. Studies on gender and recent economic restructuring in Mexico (1988-present) are few, on one hand, macro-generalizations on the immiseration of low-income women throughout the country, on the other, case examples of urban responses under debt-crisis austerity or select branches of the export industry under NAFTA. Among gender studies on rural processes, this thesis contributes by involving micro-level analysis in communities from two very distinct regions, by addressing the implications of the entire neoliberal policy package rather than a single issue, and by privileging peasant voices throughout the discussion. This closing chapter compares and contrasts the main points raised in the data chapters on San Miguel and Nexatengo and provides some final reflections on gender and economic restructuring.

6.1 THE ‘MODERNIZED’ COUNTRYSIDE: COPING WITH THE CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

It is screwed. Everyone has left. Everyone has left now. There are no people here to manage things. There is no longer people to take responsibility to be the new authorities. We are always seeing the same authorities. So in this case, there are many older women alone, that are ejidatarias. And who carries out their obligations? Well no one. [...] Their sons are not here, who should be taking up the obligations they have been given [...]. But I say to my wife, if it weren’t for the United States, I don’t know what would happen to us. Everyone, everyone. Right now we all depend on our sons. Because if it is just 200 that they send us, it unburdens us, and we pay our debts, and we can buy things for a few days. But if we didn’t have anyone there? And I like working, but I don’t earn enough to support my family (Don Benito, Z-32, April 1996).

The restructuring of the agricultural sector during the Salinas administration occurred under the slogan of ‘modernization’--cleaning up an inefficient, ‘backward’ sector by forcing it to face up to the dictates of the global market. This meant, “in other words, adjusting the agricultural sector to the needs of a changing national economy which would base future growth on exports and would become more closely integrated into regional trading areas” (Appendini, 1994:149). Throwing money into low productivity
corn cultivation on *minifundio* plots at a time when North America was selling grain surpluses at low prices, then, or leaving 50% of crop land outside the market were government policies clearly at odds with a neoliberal framework. In the National Program for the Modernization of the Countryside 1990-1994, which summed up the Salinas administration’s plans for the agricultural sector, the government put forth its intentions for inefficient grain producers to become efficient through technification, by switching to more ‘suitable’ crops, or by leaving agriculture altogether (Marsh and Runsten, 1995).

This has meant leaving the over two million peasant producers on the margins of production outside of any concerted government agricultural policy to stimulate production. San Migueleño producers, labeled as having “low production potential”, are included in this group of subsistence-level producers, disqualifying them from BANRURAL credit or programs to improve corn production. Instead they have been handed a PROCAMPO welfare check to be used to ‘switch production to more suitable crops’ or ‘engage in forest preservation’ that is not enough per day to pay for half of their families’ daily corn intake. Some San Miguéleños would like to tap subterranean water resources in order to irrigate their fields and diversify production. The former Commissariat of the *ejido* even formulated a proposal to this end, but there is lack of community consensus to collectively pay for the hydrological study and the project itself. The soil base in San Miguel, however, is so eroded it is unlikely it could support crops other than corn. Without careful technical assistance, irrigation would further deplete the soils, whose present condition is owing to the high levels of deforestation on the steeps hills of the Tentzo as firewood continues to be a principal fuel source. Thus even disposed to the idea, San Miguéleños face major obstacles to crop diversification. As marginal producers, San Miguéleños are likely to be left out of future official support; according to the government they are the kind of peasants who should leave agricultural production.

The production of fruits and vegetables has been highlighted by government rhetoric as an area that corn-producing *ejidatarios* could diversify into. Even if San
Migueleños had the soil and the money, they would probably be no better off than Nexatengueños. Research on existing small-scale vegetable production has concluded that the proposed

... diversification and/or intensification, however, entails overcoming a difficult policy environment [...] despite stated Government of Mexico support for diversification, “push” factors --out of maize-- have not been accompanied by adequate “pull” factors into alternative crops (Marsh and Runsten, 1995).

Marsh and Runsten (1995) list barriers as including lack of technical assistance, rising irrigation costs, insufficient PROCAMPO cheques, high interest rates, poor channels for marketing, lack of sufficient capital to wait for payment, lack of transport and volume, limited access to key markets, or lack of information.

In Nexatengo, producers have proved capable of switching production in the past blessed by their irrigated, high-quality crop land which will support almost any crop. They are not immune, however, to overcoming the obstacles created by an agricultural sector in crisis. Many of the processes linked to the crisis are resulting in the disappearance of better paid agricultural work in the ejido. Firstly, it is likely that the existing land market in the zone will open up due to the crisis, whether Nexatengueños use the legal framework now open to them to or not. In April of 1996, for example, the Commissariat was (illegally) offering to sell a portion of his ejido plot to be used for residential use. Nexatengo’s ejido may thus become victim to expanding urbanization, like the neighbouring ranch, El Cristo, which is now a housing development. Secondly, for those who are keeping their lands, they are opting for labour-displacing alfalfa production since milk sales are presently a more attractive farming strategy. Thirdly, the producers who are still cultivating vegetables and flowers are often outside investors who bring their own work teams.

While the current policy framework considers corn producers ‘inefficient’ and encourages them to diversify into higher value crops, Nexatengueños counter that the
alternatives posed are far from real. ‘Modernization’ policies make the government’s agenda appear less of a ‘development’ framework beneficial to rural producers and their families that inhabit the Mexican countryside and more of a blueprint for capital investment in the countryside. Overall, the general trend in recent government policy “is pro-production rather than pro-peasant” (Gates, 1996:44). At the same time, the state absolves itself of responsibility for the agricultural sector after two decades of failed state intervention and the deepening of the agricultural crisis and stresses producers assume individual responsibility in the reality of the global marketplace. Furthermore, the state has maintained that some producers will have to leave agriculture altogether, yet they have not created employment possibilities for these workers in other areas of the economy. While foreign investment grew throughout Salinas’s administration, the majority of this remained concentrated in portfolio investment rather than productive activities that generate employment.1 In those sectors where employment has been created, such as in export production, the jobs are often not attractive to keep turnover down and establish a productive worker base. The feminized labour markets in Nexatongo exemplify such a trend.

As a result of the current state of affairs in the two ejidos, both San Miguel and Nexatengo will continue to subsidize agricultural production and rural life though emigration to urban labour markets in Canada and the United States. In San Miguel, migrants will begin to include local wage labourers formerly employed in Puebla and Mexico City whose livelihoods are not viable in the current economic depression. In Nexatengo, new migrants will include landless day labourers and former producers looking for more secure incomes. For capitalists operating in North America, such labour flows will prove advantageous to their own efforts in order to remain competitive in the world.

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1In the early 1990s, six times the amount of new capital flows into Mexico were concentrated in stock market speculation than direct productive investment (Otero, 1996).
market, as economic restructuring in the North relies on a further disciplining of the domestic work force to accept lower wage costs.

Field research since the 1980s has shown that migration from Mexican communities to the United States tends to, over time, develop an increasingly diverse economic, social, demographic composition rather than be limited to a narrow group in the community (Massey et al., 1994). Massey, Durand, and Goldring claim that trends toward a more diverse migrant group:

follow theoretically from the fact that migration affects individual motivations and social structures in ways that encourage additional migration. As a result, transnational migration tends to become a self-reinforcing process that acquires an internal momentum all its own. Over time it becomes increasingly dependent of the conditions that originally caused it (1994:1496).

While the reasons why people begin to migrate may be community-specific, each act of migration puts in motion a series of changes in motivations, social structures, and cultural values that tend to create the conditions for additional, future migration (Massey, 1990). Migration becomes a "generalized social and economic practice" (Massey et al., 1994: 1528). With time and extensive back and forth border-crossing, "transnational circuits" are created between communities of origin and destination with the continuous circulation of people, capital, information, etc. (Rouse, 1991).

In San Miguel, increasing trends towards long-term or semi-permanent migration will not likely lead to an ‘abandonment of agriculture’ even without institutional support for corn production. Producers’ relationship with the agricultural bureaucracy has been far from successful: the BANRURAL agent defrauded them, the insurance agent involved them in his corruption scheme, and their own ejido representatives profited from the distribution of subsidized fertilizer. With or without state presence, the San Migueleños

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2Studies on Mexican migration have thus broadened theories of transnational migration by exploring the debate further than ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. That is, transnational migration between the U.S. and Mexico is thus not only self-reinforcing, but often bi-directional rather than uni-directional, more fluid and less mechanical (Simmons 1991, cited in Herrera et al., n.d.).
who are not involved in migration flows—in their majority, women—will continue to cultivate their ejido parcels. On one hand, milpa production is women’s only sure defense in the global economy where their role as reproducers most commonly leaves them on the Mexican side of the transnational migration circuit and subordinate to its benefits. On the other hand, planting and harvesting corn is an integral part of being a Migueleño, embedded in the cultural fabric of the community that Migueleños on both sides of the border actively maintain. Women’s continued perseverance and pride as milpa producers, thus, reflects a degree of cultural contestation to the current economic model that is threatening their communities. Upholding this type of subsistence production is not only survival; it is also a rejection of other relations of production outside of their control and a reinforcement of their community’s cultural heritage.3

Continued emigration-based strategies, however, have been accompanied a deepening of the ‘feminization of poverty’. The labeling of emigration as a ‘male’ survival strategy becomes very obvious when the lifestyles of women in the communities and the men in the North were compared. While the women were malnourished, lacked proper footwear, worked 16 hours a day in the fields, and had onerous domestic burdens, their sons, husbands, and brothers had clothing budgets, often ate outside the home, bought luxury items such as alcohol and cigarettes, and sometimes had entertainment budgets. Emigration does not mean the same thing for all women; some received remittances regularly while others had been deserted. In all cases, however, the absence of male labour translates into an intensification of women’s participation in subsistence agriculture and community life. Ironically, while women are exercising agrarian rights to a greater extent than ever before—defending issues related to their ejidos, participating in assemblies, making trips to Puebla when bureaucratic requisites demand, cashing PROCAMPO cheques or managing those of PRONASOL—the government has put ejido parcel titles in their husbands’ names and the Procuraduría Agraria has not been ruling in their favor.

3See Marroni (1994) on peasant women’s rejection of labour-saving tortilla technology in this regard.
Many women are facing extremely stressful situations under the increased obligations and responsibilities they have been forced to assume. Loneliness and isolation add to stressful situations. More and more young women are leaving for the North out of absolute despair, which means securing their parents, in-laws, and husbands' consent. Rising female migration, is an area demanding of future research. As daughters and daughter-in-laws leave, the women who remain lose an important source of labour in domestic and productive work, and often their only source of emotional support. What will this mean for the physical and emotional health of the women left behind?

Increased emigration trends are having similar effects in Nexatengo, although women here seem to have more liberty to participate in emigration and local labour markets alongside their husbands or as single young women. For those with children, it has often meant leaving their children in their mothers' care for extended periods of time. Like San Miguel, some of the more negative consequences of male migration on the women that stay behind were noticeable, such as in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases contracted by migrants and cases of desertion. Women's only choice when faced with abandonment is to place their child care burdens on their family and go to work in the ranches or with the *ejidatarios*.

The low-wage employment opportunities in the ranches will likely continue to grow. Although in May 1996 these enterprises found interest rates still too high to permit expansion and thus reap the benefits of export production after a currency devaluation, capitalist producers were hopeful that initiatives on the part of the federal government and the larger banks were not far off. The responses of the Girasol ranch during the first 16 months of the crisis to suppress wages benefits illustrates where their competitive edge in the world market is based. One worker, angry that the ranches' higher profits from exports had not trickled down to employees but had meant harder times, opinionated the following:
I think that the bosses are just interested in making themselves richer. And to work the people to the limits of their tolerance, because that’s the way it is. That is how I see it, well in whatever type of work, I think in them all, no? Because here it really is like that. But our bosses here, to them all the workers are stupid, do you understand? They want to work them to death, if it can be done [...] I think that the bosses search to make themselves richer and whatever happens to the poor worker happens ... (Claudia, Z-23, April 1996).

Despite high levels of exploitation and abuse, the location of these enterprises within the community and rural families’ desperation for full-time employment opportunities will result in a constant labour supply of young, female workers.

6.2 GENDER AND ‘COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE’

The neoliberal restructuring of the Mexican economy, in line with restructuring on a global scale, relies on new and old strategies to cheapen, and thus also discipline, labour in order to ensure continued capitalist accumulation. Capitalist expansion and growth in Mexico has relied fundamentally on the exploitation of a large peasant class, as well as the use of other social hierarchies such as gender. The transformative processes taking place in the countryside under neoliberal reform discussed in this thesis, such as rural emigration, which has pushed the women who remain to assume added responsibilities, or the feminization of agricultural labour markets, where the success of export production relies on cheap female labour, are illustrative of the ways in which gender subordination acts as one of Mexico’s ‘comparative advantages’ in the capitalist process of globalization. This is also illustrated in new government policies, which continue to legislate gender inequality or do nothing to change it.

The asymmetric gender division of labour within the peasant household that assigns women the overwhelming responsibility of the tasks related to reproduction, regardless of their degree of involvement in other activities is both the cause and effect of their gender subordination. Chapter 2 argued that gender subordination within the domestic sphere has not only allowed capitalists historically to remunerate labour for less than its actual reproduction costs, but has also prevented social unrest in the countryside with the
deepening of the agricultural crisis as women 'cushion' the more brutal consequences of neoliberal economic austerity. June Nash has applauded work by contemporary Marxist feminists that have:

picked up the focus on subsistence production as they underscore the importance of peasant commodity production and housework to accumulation [...]. If we cannot solve the equations posed by nonwaged and superexploited work in the underground economies springing up like mushrooms throughout the world, we will not be able to assess the flow of resources at either the production or distribution end (1994:9)

The continued practice of survival and subsistence activities, she argues, are important sites for the development of consciousness and organized action based on the right to live in the present crisis of capitalism (1994).

In both Nexatengo and San Miguel, increasing impoverishment and its gendered implications have not become politicized, as has occurred in other rural and urban areas in Mexico (Logan, 1990; Martin, 1989; Stephen 1992, 1996). In the majority of protests dominated by women, they have mobilized as an extension of their social roles in the household--especially their roles as mothers--when economic or political obstacles impinge on their ability to fulfill these roles. In Mexico, fatherhood does not claim a similar centrality in the lives of men nor the social responsibility and significance that motherhood does for women (Logan, 1990). Women are also culturally inhibited to escape their familial responsibilities through alcohol, drugs, or desertion (Logan, 1990; Benería and Roldán, 1987):

The man, he only sets himself to work in the fields, and then he is free. His tasks are all finished and he comes home. He wants to eat and even if the woman has not finished her tasks, she has to attend to him, even though you still don’t finish. [...] Because a man can’t do it, so many problems don’t fit in his head. And he doesn’t do much more than drink, because by drinking you forget about everything. Yes, they forget about everything. And you [a woman] can’t do that (Amelia, Z-13, May 1995).

As women politicize their primary gender role as mothers, they are subverting the site of their gender subordination into an arena in political action.
Mother-based movements have been particularly attractive to low-income women in Mexico because they often break their loneliness and isolation. An area for further research in rural communities, therefore, could be community-based initiatives that have brought peasant women together to create their own support groups. Throughout the research project, high levels of stress, depression, and despair among women were observed. Many women complained of stress related illnesses such as insomnia and migraine headaches:

You won’t believe that I have got very sick because of my rages, I have become extremely sick, very bad. Or I make myself sick [...] Sometimes I am in bed for three days and I can’t get up because my head hurts [...] Because now it doesn’t fit in my head anymore, all this pain. [...] It doesn’t fit in my head, all the pain that I have in my head because of everything, I don’t want anymore problems because they are hurting me. (Concepción, Z-11, May 1995).

When I began the research process, I did not think women would respond so positively to telling me their stories, yet I began to realize that sometimes we were talking about things they had never talked about before (e.g. gender inequality and land tenure) and that for some women the conversations were an arena where they could speak without being accused of being lazy ‘chismosas’ (gossips). One woman, who shouldered the household responsibilities when her husband was an alcoholic said:

[A woman] can’t even go to see the neighbour lady. He is going to say: ‘who did you go see?’ [...] Oh my god, how I wanted to see a priest, tell him everything, oh no! Another thing that stayed with me, is that I wanted to pay someone to have the patience in order to tell them everything, in order to give me advice, something. This was the only thing that I thought of. To talk to someone. Because it does good. Lets out some problems. (Amelia, Z-13, May 1995).

Part of the reason, however, that women in San Miguel and Nexatengo continue to internalize their struggles within their families is the degree of social differentiation occurring within the communities that creates ‘envidias’ or covetousness. ‘Envidias’ was often the reason given why women did not get involved with the Peasant Women’s Group
in San Miguel or why only a few Nexatengueños had entered the Chamboucy cooperative. Numerous indications of peasants’ lack of information surrounding key government programs throughout the field research suggested that an area deserving of further exploration would be popular education initiatives that have had success bringing community members from all social strata together to inform themselves of government policies and their potential implications and critically assess those policies.

Based on the current level of political consciousness in San Miguel Acuxcomac and Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo, however, it is unlikely that women will organize support groups or politicize their situations. Even in the floriculture ranches where women worked together daily, as Claudia pointed out throughout Chapter 5, the workers lacked organizational ‘initiative’ although confronted with abuse and exploitation. At the present time, gender subordination in these two communities will continue to act as one of Mexico’s ‘comparative advantages’ in the global economy, as women work harder to keep their households and communities from collapse, by ensuring the daily subsistence of their families, by providing the cheap labour that keeps exporting enterprises competitive, and by reproducing a migrant labour force for North America.

This is not to pre-empt, however, the possibility of unexpected local responses to the sweeping changes that are transforming the countryside, the Mexican economy, and the global economy as a result of neoliberal or “corporate” agendas in other countries. In both communities this is manifested in the desire to maintain community life, albeit a revised “ruralidad”. These new local responses will be marked by rural peoples’ new roles in a restructured economy, such as those emigration has implied for both the individuals who stay and the individuals who leave. While beginning at the household level, they may have much broader consequences.

I think that it is the inheritance of our ancestors that the woman is the one that should do all the housework—and now, the youth are modernizing! Because the other time that my son was here, he brought his wife as well. And she says: ‘Gregorio! Help your mother; don’t you see she’s getting
tired? One gets tired cooking and all that. Get up and help her sweep the patio or something.' She would help inside too, I just looked at my son and it made him laugh. [...] One day my husband was here and it made him laugh too. By chance, the woman went out and my husband had left too. And my son tells me, 'Mom, don’t pay attention to what Angela says. It’s that there we are used to it. For example, if she is cooking, or making the lunch that we will take with us,’ he says, ‘I make the beds, sweep, and iron the clothes. And she does the kitchen stuff.’ And so the two of them: ‘Hurry, let’s work’. [...] But he says, ‘If my father sees me washing the dishes here, who knows where he’d send me!’ [laughing]. (Josefina, Z-10, May 1995).

You saw that day, I had a lot of dough to make into tortillas? That day he mopped the rooms. Later he says to me, ‘It embarrasses me,’ he says, ‘that the people see me. But inside here I will do it.’ And he goes, puts in his buckets of water and his Pinol [cleaner], and there he is, inside, mopping. [Laughter]. And when he finishes, he says ‘I swept everywhere well, and I mopped.’ I say, ‘Uh-huh? Good.’ And when he goes out, he feeds the pigs, and he says, ‘I just won’t wash the dishes because they are outside, and it embarrasses me. The people will see me.’ Yes, it embarrasses him. [...] But there in New York, they are accustomed that a man does housework. And he says, ‘Still, in New York, I go, I wash my dishes and everything, but here if they see me washing they are going to say that I am cowardly’ (María Elena, Z-20, May 1995).
APPENDIX 1: Informant Profiles, San Miguel Acuexcomac

### TABLE 1.1
Informants Ages 45 and over, San Miguel Acuexcomac

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Civil Status</th>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Migrant(s) Puebla &amp; Mexico City</th>
<th>Migrant(s) U.S.</th>
<th>Ejido Land (HA)</th>
<th>Private Prop. (M)</th>
<th>Share -crop. (HA)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liliana (A1)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>M(^a)</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Puebla: Daughter (18) Mexico City: Son (20)</td>
<td>Son (31)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esperanza (A2)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Puebla: Daughter (31)</td>
<td>Son (25) Son (23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alba (A1)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td></td>
<td>Son (28) Son (26) Daughter (22) Daughter (20) Son (17)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>50x75</td>
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<td>Amanda (A4)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Puebla: Daughter (21) Mexico City: Son (26) Son (24)</td>
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<td>María (A5)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Puebla: Daughter (15)</td>
<td>Husband (50) Son-in-law (27) Son (17)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>--</td>
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</table>

\(a\): M = married; S = separated; C = common law; D = divorced; G = single; W = widow
<table>
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<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>CIVIL STATUS</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD TYPE</th>
<th>MIGRANT(S) PUEBLA &amp; MEXICO CITY</th>
<th>MIGRANT(S) U.S.</th>
<th>EJIDO LAND (HA)</th>
<th>PRIVATE PROP. (M)</th>
<th>SHARE CROP (HA)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lolita (A-10)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>M*</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Mexico City: Husband (45)</td>
<td>Husband (45)</td>
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<td>Daughter (25)</td>
<td>Daughter (25)</td>
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<td>Son (22)</td>
<td>Son (22)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Daughter (17)</td>
<td>Daughter (17)</td>
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<td>Leona (A-11)</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Puebla: Daughter (19)</td>
<td>Husband (46)</td>
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<td>Husband (38)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pancha (A-14)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>S</td>
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<td>Rosa (A-15)</td>
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</table>

a: M = married; S = separated; C = common law; D = divorced; G = single; W = widow
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>CIVIL STATUS</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD TYPE</th>
<th>MIGRANT(S) PUEBLA &amp; MEXICO CITY</th>
<th>MIGRANT(S) U.S.</th>
<th>EJIDO LAND (HA.)</th>
<th>PRIVATE PROP (M)</th>
<th>SHARE -CROP. (HA.)</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Cecilia</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Husband (25)</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<td>(A-22)</td>
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<td>Raquel</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Husband (25)</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>(A-23)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a: M = married; S = separated; C = common law; D = divorced; G = single; W = widow
**APPENDIX 2: BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: .........................................................
Date: ...........................................................
Address: ......................................................

1. **HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relation to informant</th>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Civil Status</th>
<th>Main Occupation</th>
<th>Migrant to U.S.</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. **ACCESS TO LAND**

Are you ejidatarios or holders of ejido land?
- [ ] Ejidatario
- [ ] Holders of land

- [ ] Hectares (ha) inheritance
- [ ] Hectares (ha) purchase Year: ...........

- [ ] Size of Urban Lot inheritance
- [ ] Size of Urban Lot purchase Year: ...........

- [ ] Neighbour
  - A) # of Lots: ...........
  - B) [ ] Own: [ ] inheritance [ ] sale Year: ........... [ ] Rent [ ] Borrow
  - C) Size: ..............

3. **CHARACTERISTICS OF DWELLING AND URBAN LOT**

In what year was this house constructed?

YEAR: ..............

**MATERIALS:**

- [ ] Roof: [ ] Sheet 
- [ ] Thatch 
- [ ] Cement 
- [ ] Palm

- [ ] Walls: [ ] Adobe 
- [ ] Cement block 
- [ ] Brick 
- [ ] Palm

- [ ] Plaster 
- [ ] Plastered Adobe 
- [ ] Plastered Block 
- [ ] Plastered Brick 
- [ ] Carizo

- [ ] Floor: [ ] Dirt 
- [ ] Cement 
- [ ] Tiles 
- [ ] Other

**NUMBER OF ROOMS:**

- [ ] 1 
- [ ] 2 
- [ ] 3 
- [ ] 4 
- [ ] 5

**NUMBER OF HOMES:**

- [ ] 1 
- [ ] 2 
- [ ] 3 
- [ ] 4 
- [ ] 5

**KITCHEN:**

- [ ] Sheet 
- [ ] Carizo 
- [ ] Palma 
- [ ] Block 
- [ ] Other

**FOOD FOR COOKING:**

- [ ] Gas 
- [ ] Firewood

**Have you always cooked with gas?**

- [ ] Yes 
- [ ] No

**TORTILLAS:**

- [ ] Bought 
- [ ] Make

**GROCERIES:** How much do you usually spend on groceries per week?
ACCESS TO WATER & WATER FACILITIES:

☐ Well  ☐ Pump  ☐ Drainage  ☐ Tank  ☐ Bathroom

Where do you do your laundry?

ELECTRODOMÉSTICOS:

☐ TV  ☐ VCR  ☐ Tape recorder  ☐ Stereo

☐ Blender  ☐ Microwave  ☐ Stove  ☐ Mill

☐ Refrigerator  ☐ Washing Machine  ☐ Gas Comal  ☐ Other

4. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

SOLAR: What do you have planted in your solar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Ejido (ha.)</th>
<th>Rent (ha.)</th>
<th>Sharecrop (ha. offer)</th>
<th>Sharecrop (ha. taken)</th>
<th>Peons</th>
<th>Family Help</th>
<th>Investment</th>
<th>Profits</th>
<th>Market</th>
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<tr>
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LIVESTOCK RESOURCES:

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<tr>
<th>Livestock</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Caretaker</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Profits</th>
<th>Destination</th>
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<tr>
<td>BULLS</td>
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<td>DONKEYS</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIGS</td>
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<td>GOATS</td>
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<td>SHEEP</td>
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<tr>
<td>TURKEYS</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHICKENS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RABBITS</td>
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**APPENDIX 3: Informant Profiles, Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo**

**TABLE 1.1 List of Informants Ages 45-60, Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Civil Status</th>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Household Income Source</th>
<th>Ejido Land (ha.)</th>
<th>Urban Lot (m)</th>
<th>Agricultural Production 1994</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabet</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Crop Sales, Land Rents</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>47x92</td>
<td>Gladiola Foliage Statice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benita</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Day labour (ego), Milk Sales, Crop Sales, Land Rents</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>40x50</td>
<td>Statice Foliage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariana</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Remittances (5 sons), (1 daughter)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>24x20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenia</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Commerce (ego), Remittances (husband)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.5 ha.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Crop Sales, Land rents, Day labour (son)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Onions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Crops Sales, Land rents, Day labour</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>30x20</td>
<td>Onions</td>
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*a: M = married; S = separated; C = common law; D = divorced; G = single; W = widow*
<table>
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<th>CIVIL STATUS</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD TYPE</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD INCOME SOURCE</th>
<th>EJIDO LAND (HAS.)</th>
<th>URBAN LOT (M)</th>
<th>AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION 1994</th>
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<tr>
<td>Josefina</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Remittances (2 sons)</td>
<td>50x25</td>
<td>40x21</td>
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<td>Concepción</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Remittances (2 sons)</td>
<td>50x25</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Day labour (ego)</td>
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<td>10x30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Milk Sales Land Rents</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.5 ha.</td>
<td>Alfalfa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dorotea</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Day labour (ego)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>15x40</td>
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a: M = married; S = separated; C = common law; D = divorced; G = single; W = widow
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Household Income Source</th>
<th>Ejido Land (has.)</th>
<th>Urban Lot (m)</th>
<th>Agricultural Production 1994</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>María Elena</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Crop Sales Milk Sales Day labour (husband) Tortilla sales (ego)</td>
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<td>50x25</td>
<td>Alfalfa Corn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Day labour (husband) (son in-law) Crop Sales (ego)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>15x40</td>
<td>Statice Foliage</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Day labour (husband)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Cilantro Cempasuchitl</td>
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<td>Claudia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Day labour (ego)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cony</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Extended (parents)</td>
<td>Crop Sales Milk Sales</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Cilantro Epazote Onions</td>
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*a: M = married; S = separated; C = common law; D = divorced; G = single; W = widow*
APPENDIX 4: General List of Informants, San Miguel Acuxcomac

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Migr. Part.</th>
<th>Agric</th>
<th>Shep</th>
<th>Craf</th>
<th>Domest</th>
<th>Migr</th>
<th>Wage</th>
<th>Grup</th>
<th>Offic</th>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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a: Migrant Partner: I = intermittent emigration; E = extended emigration
b: Main Activities: AGRI(CULTURE); SHEP(HERDING); Craf(T PRODUCTION); DOM(ESTIC WORK); (E)MIG(RATION); WAG(E LABOUR, AS FIELD HAND); (COMMUNITY) OFFIC(E).
**APPENDIX 5: General List of Informants, Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo**

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a: Migrant Partner: I = intermittent emigration; E = extended emigration

b: Main Activities: **DAY** (Labour in ejido); **RANC** (Employee); **CROP** (Production & Sale); **MILK** (Production); **COM** (Merce); **DOM** (Domestic Work); **(E)MIG** (Emigration).
APPENDIX 6: Map of San Miguel Acuexcomac

APPENDIX 7: Map of Emiliano Zapata Nexatengo

**APPENDIX 8: Worker Profile in Girasol Ranch, April 1996**

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<tr>
<th>PACKAGING PLANT</th>
<th>SEX</th>
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<th>RESIDES WITH PARENTS</th>
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**GREENHOUSE #1**

| worker #1     | male   | 30  | no                   | married      | 2                  |
| worker #2     | female | 27  | yes                  | separated    | 5                  |
| worker #3     | female | 23  | yes                  | separated    | 1                  |
| worker #4     | female | 19  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #5     | female | 18  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #6     | female | 15  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |

**GREENHOUSE #2**

| worker #1     | female | 43  | no                   | separated    | 3                  |
| worker #2     | female | 19  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #3     | female | 19  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #4     | female | 18  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #5     | female | 17  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #6     | male   | 17  | yes                  | married      | 1                  |

**GREENHOUSE #3**

| worker #1     | male   | 46  | no                   | widow        | 3                  |
| worker #2     | female | 18  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #3     | female | 17  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #4     | female | 17  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #5     | female | 17  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
| worker #6     | female | 16  | yes                  | single       | 0                  |
**DEFINED TERMS**


**Depesantization:** the separation of the peasantry from exclusive dependence upon land for subsistence (Harris, 1978).

**Ejido:** a community-based system of land tenure that came in response to one of the principal demands of the Mexican Revolution. Under agrarian reform legislation, the government protected privately held parcels and communal lands within the community from the market. Before changes to the Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992, ejido lands were inalienable. They could not be bought, sold, or rented—even though in actuality this did occur. The ejidos were subject to a great deal of state tutelage, which encouraged political patronage, corruption, and centralization of power within the ejido communities (Barry, 1995; Gates, 1993).

**Feminization of Poverty:** Refers to a number of socioeconomic indicators which show that women as a disproportionately affected by growing impoverishment due to the historical cheapening of their labour power, devaluation of their domestic non-waged labour, and the structural disadvantages they face in general terms as related to the subordination of their gender.

**Import Substitution Industrialization:** The central elements of this economic model include protectionist measures against foreign trade, state subsidies for local production and consumption, the formation of a para-state sector in the economy, and direct foreign investment by transnational corporations (Otero, 1996).

**Neoliberalism:** can be characterized as advocating export-oriented industrialization (economic liberalization, open markets, free trade); massive cutbacks in public spending in most sectors of the economy, the privatization of State-owned enterprises; and controlling wages downward to attract new waves of foreign investment (Otero, 1996; Hettne, 1990).

**Popular movements:** in contrast to ‘social movements’, which can emerge from any sector of the population around any particular social issue or perspective, ‘popular movements’ emerge from the disenfranchised or marginalized sectors of a population. In urban areas, popular movements involve strong residential or neighbourhood ties. In the countryside, demands often involve specific pieces of land or resource tracts to which they are trying to gain access to, or agricultural issues such as obtaining productive inputs and credits (Logan, 1990; Stephen, 1989).
Proletarianization: the process by which peasants shift from being direct producers to selling their labour power for a wage, also noting that "the salary of the one who sells his [or her] labor be the principal base of his [or her] reproduction" (Paré, 1977:55).
Glossary

_Campesino_: literally peasant, but used to refer to most “people of the country”: ejidatarios, jornaleros, etc.
_Carrizo_: hardened corn stalks that can serve as poles in construction
_Carpeta Básica_: an ejido’s archive of their agrarian history
_Cartera Vencida_: loan default
_Calmil_: small area under cultivation in the _solar_
_Cencali_: small, roofed structure, built off the ground for grain storage
_Chiquihuites_: large, sturdy, woven baskets
_Colado_: roofing ceremony
_Conal_: a round sheet, made of pottery or metal, used to make tortillas. Gas _comales_ are a modernized version, that are fed by propane and are supported by steel legs so the _comal_ reaches waist level.
_Compadres_: fictive kin
_Coyote_: a person who is self-employed in the illegal crossing of migrant workers
_Ejidatario_: “an individual with legally recognized individual or collective rights to farm land belonging to an _ejido_” (Gates 1993)
_Epazote_: An herb that is very popular in Mexican cuisine or as a tea that has anti-parasitic properties
_Matlanes_: The weaving of petates between two people; one day they both weave one woman’s petate, and the next day they go on to the other’s.
_Milpa_: small fields often planted with a corn-beans-squash combination
_Minifundia_: an infrasubsistence landholding less than 4 hectares large
_Nixtamal_: corn softened in water and lime before it is ground to make dough.
_Petates_: flexible, woven sleeping mats made from palm
_Quiote_: the long stalk that grows from the maguey plant, used in construction
_Recaudo_: vegetable complement to a corn and beans diet: tomatoes, chile, onions, cilantro
_Solar_: open yards close to the dwelling; usually under cultivation
_Temascal_: steam bath; made of stones in an igloo-shape
_Tlecuil_: Hearth for cooking. Usually constructed of three lrocks that are situated to support cooking pots; the _comal_ is placed over these rocks to make _tortillas_.
_Yunta_: team of work animals
_Zacate_: usually refers to the corn plant not used for consumption and destined to animal feed; can also refer to corn produced for animal feed
_Zoyamate_: palm
## ACRONYMS

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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Note: The abbreviations are used in the text for various organizations and programs in Mexico.
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