Gender, Land Rights, and Rural Social Movements: 
Regional Differences in the Brazilian Agrarian Reform

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INTRODUCTION

From a gender perspective, the Brazilian agrarian reform stands out on two counts: the relatively low share of female beneficiaries compared with other Latin American countries, and the broad regional variation by state in the share of women who are direct beneficiaries of the reform. The former is curious in that Brazil in 1988, along with Colombia, were the first countries to explicitly introduce the possibility of joint adjudication and titling to couples of land distributed through the agrarian reform. Yet in the mid 1990s women constituted only 12.6 percent of the beneficiaries in Brazil compared with 45 percent in recent land distributions in Colombia. Further, a comparative analysis with Latin American countries who introduced gender-progressive agrarian legislation in the 1990s shows that these measures have been least implemented in Brazil (Deere and León 2001a; 2001b). This raises the question of why Brazil has been such a laggard in securing women’s land rights.

One reason is that whereas in Brazil joint adjudication and titling to couples is an option, in most other countries it is now mandatory that lands distributed by the state be jointly titled. Given deep-seated cultural practices (supported by legal norms until recently) that only husbands represent the household and manage its assets, it is not surprising that joint titling must be mandatory for this measure to be implemented effectively. Moreover, in most countries the attainment and implementation of gender-progressive legislation has depended on the existence of strong rural women’s organizations and their persistence in demanding recognition of women’s land rights (Deere and León 2001a: chpt.6).

What is also curious about the Brazilian case is that rural women, beginning in the 1980s, began to participate in growing numbers in rural unions and in the nascent landless movement, as well as to form their own autonomous organizations (Deere and León 1999). Their demands for land rights were formally attained in the 1988 Federal Constitution that established that in land to be distributed through the agrarian reform, “land titles or use rights be given to men, to women, or to both, independent of their civil status,” (Article 189, in da Luz 1996: 177). But after 1988

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2 Following Bina Agarwal (1994: 9) we define gender-progressive as “those laws, practices, policies, etc. which reduce or eliminate the inequities (economic, social or political) that women face in relation to men.”

3 The 1988 Federal Constitution of Brazil established that “the rights and obligations of the marital society are to be jointly exercised by the man and the woman” (Article 226, in CFEMEA 1996: 49). Most Latin American countries established the “dual headed household” through constitutional or civil code reform in the 1970s and 1980s (Deere and León 2001a: Table 2.1).

4 This constitutional article, as well as a number of others dealing with women’s rights, was the result of a popular amendment to the constitution, one resulting from a nation-wide signature campaign. It was the initiative of feminist activists and scholars who worked in tandem.
there was relatively little follow-up on women’s land rights as organized rural women and their organizations prioritized other issues.

It took twelve years until some of the rural social movements successfully championed women’s land rights at the national level. In August 2000, the demand for the joint adjudication and titling of land to couples under the agrarian reform finally figured prominently in the Marcha das Margaridas, coordinated by CONTAG (Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura) in coalition with MMTR-NE (Movimento das Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais do Noreste) and other groups. As in other Latin American countries, once organized rural women began to demand land rights and consistently confront the state on this issue, the institute of agrarian reform, INCRA (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agraria) was forced to revise its regulations.

One of the main questions of this paper is why it took so long for organized rural women to demand effective recognition of their land rights. I argue that this is related to two factors: i) the multiple and often competing venues for participation which opened up to rural women in the 1980s and 1990s and the heterogenous priorities of these rural social movements; and ii) the tremendous regional variation characterizing Brazil. These two factors are inter-related, for the weight of the different social movements and the relationship between them at any point in time varies at the regional level and even by state within the same region.

The regional variation characterizing Brazil is aptly captured by the data on women’s participation as direct beneficiaries of the agrarian reform. According to the Primeiro Censo Nacional da Reforma Agraria of 1996, women’s participation ranged from a high of 17.9 percent in the state of Rio de Janeiro, followed by Amazonas, Paraíba and Pernambuco (all 16.5 percent or above), to a low of around seven percent in Paraná and Santa Catarina (INCRA/CRUB/UnB 1998: 26). Overall, women’s participation was much higher in the Northeast and Southeast than in the South or Center-West regions of Brazil.

To what extent can this regional variation in women’s participation be explained by structural factors? One would assume that since joint titling to couples was not mandatory, the majority of female beneficiaries would be household heads; that is widows, separated, divorced or single women. Thus, to what extent are such regional disparities explained by variations in the share of female-headed rural households, gender-biased migration patterns and/or women’s

with the Conselho Nacional de Direitos da Mulher (CNDM) which had been established under the Sarney government. Beginning in 1986, under the banner “Constituinte pra valer tem que ter Direitos da Mulher,” meetings and seminars on women’s rights were held throughout the country. The impetus to place women’s land rights on the constitutional agenda came from organized rural women’s demands (as will be subsequently demonstrated) and the lobbying effort which resulted from the 1987 seminar “Mulher Rurais: identidades na pesquisa e na luta politica” organized by the IPPUR/UFRJ (Lavinas 1987). Interview by the author and Magdalena León with researcher Heleithe Saffioti, 28 June 1998, São Paulo.
participation rates in agriculture? To what extent are such variations a reflection of the particular manner in which the rural social movements have developed, their priorities, and women’s participation within them?

I argue that the regional variation in women’s participation in the agrarian reform – as captured in the mid-1990s – was a combination of structural, institutional and subjective factors. In the first section of the paper I review the trajectory of the rural social movements on the issue of gender and land rights. In the next section I provide a more detailed analysis of the state-level variation in women’s participation in the agrarian reform, first focusing on the quantitative variables with which it may be correlated, and then on the heterogenous role and demands of the rural social movements in the Northeast and South of Brazil. The third section turns to developments since 1996, when all of the rural social movements began to internalize gender concerns and, specifically, women’s land rights, to a much greater degree than in the past. The main findings, as well as the arguments for women’s land rights, are summarized in the conclusion.

THE ORGANIZATION OF RURAL WOMEN

The genesis of the rural women's movement (broadly defined) is found in the context of the democratic opening of the 1980s and the consolidation of the feminist and women’s movement in Brazil. According to Paola Cappellin (1997: 646), “A mobilização das mulheres rurais não se forma na prática sindical, mas a partir de debates sobre as condições de vida realizados em pequenos grupos, a maioria de matriz religiosa ligados às pastorais, mas também grupos de matriz laica formados a partir das mobilizações de resistência às expulsões dos moradores das fazendas.” Throughout Brazil, the Christian base communities (CBEs), organized by the Catholic Church in the 1960s and 1970s or the women’s groups formed by the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) (organized by the National Council of Catholic Bishops in 1975) beginning in that latter decade were often the formative experience that led rural women to question social injustice, often linked to health or education issues.

But given that the main organizational structure in rural areas were the rural unions, in the decade of the 1980s the rural women’s movement developed around two central demands: the incorporation of women into the unions and the extension of social security benefits, including paid maternity leave and retirement, to rural women workers (Siqueira 1991: 58). These demands reflect the growing participation of rural women in the agricultural labor force and the discrimination that women faced both as wage workers and within the rural unions.

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5 This section draws on Deere and León (1999), supplemented by the author’s research in Brazil during 2000.

6 On the development of the feminist and women’s movement in Brazil in the context of the democratic opening see Alvarez (1990).
The roots of the MMTR in the Northeast can be traced to meetings held in Brejo, Paraíba and Serra Tablada in the Sertão Central of Pernambuco during 1982 and 1983, largely focused on the emergency situation provoked by the drought. But by 1984, when the first official meeting of the MMTR-Sertão Central took place, the main concern was how to increase the participation of rural women workers within the union movement (FETAPE 1986).

Note that rural women union members in the South were also meeting regularly in the early 1980s, concerned principally with how to increase their numbers within the local and state union structure. In Rio Grande do Sul, for example, the first of what were to become annual meetings, Encontros Estaduais de Líderes Femininas of FETAG-RS (Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura no Rio Grande do Sul), took place in 1981 (Prá and Britto 1988: 29). The Primer Encontro Estadual de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais, organized by FETAG-RS in October, 1985, was attended by some 10,000 rural women. There they selected forty-eight women to attend the Fourth CONTAG Congress and “a partir desse ano que a Comissão Estadual [das Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais] se solidificou” (FETAG-RS 1998: 6-7).

Up through the mid-1980s in the rural unions affiliated with CONTAG it was generally assumed that only one person per household could be a union member, generally the male household head. Moreover, women were rarely considered to work in agriculture, their work being "invisible," whether as unpaid family workers or temporary wage workers. In the state of Paraíba, for example, union leaders argued that women were not rural workers; that since they were a dependent of their husbands they had no need to join the unions because they had guaranteed benefits; and they even claimed that the unionization of wives was prohibited by law, although this was not the case (MMTR-NE 1987: 51-53; Albuquerque and Rufino 1987: 328).

Since the unions were the main source of health care in rural areas, the exclusion of women from union membership meant that female household heads were at a severe disadvantage. Women were also at a disadvantage in terms of retirement benefits since only one person per family was eligible for retirement benefits, the household head. Moreover, whereas workers received 50 percent of the minimum wage upon retirement, their widows received a survivor’s pension equivalent to only 30 percent (Suárez and Libardoni 1992: 122-23).

It was not until 1985 at the Fourth Congress of CONTAG that rural women’s issues were seriously addressed in a national forum of the labor movement. The impetus came from the First Meeting of Rural Women Workers of the Sertão Central in 1984. At this meeting a proposal was formulated to present to the CONTAG Congress in Brasilia that a priority of the organization should be the unionization of rural women workers and consideration of their concerns (Cappellin 1989: 256). The women’s demands were backed by the male leaders of FETAPE (Federação dos Trabalhadores Agrícolas de Pernambuco) who accompanied the women to Brasilia.

At its Fourth Congress CONTAG adopted the goal of incorporating women into the union structure and recognized that women experienced specific problems of discrimination, particularly wage discrimination. Local-level unions (STRs, sindicatos dos trabalhadores rurais) were

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Portella and Camurça (n.d.) report that at CONTAG’s Fourth Congress women represented only one percent of the participants. By 1987 women represented approximately 29 percent of the membership of the unions affiliated with CONTAG. This figure is based on a sample of 1,398 STRs (with 4.1 million members) out of the 2,913 STRs affiliated with CONTAG. Its total membership at that time was estimated as approximately 9 million (FETAPE 1988).

One of the factors which explains the opening of CONTAG to women members at this point in time was the growth of what is known as “the new unionism” and the competition between CONTAG and the recently-formed and more radical CUT (Central Única dos Trabalhadores) for new members. For the first time in many years, contested elections were taking place at the local and state level, and women were coming to be viewed as a potential positive force for change within the traditional union structure.

During this same period the CUT, at its Second National Congress in 1986, organized a women’s commission, the Comissão Nacional sobre a Questão da Mulher Trabalhadora, to address the concerns of both urban and rural women. The impulse for this latter development also came from the Northeast, from the state of Paraíba, where the first state-level Secretaria da Mulher of CUT had been created at the First State CUT Congress in 1985 (Cappellin 1989: 260). The Secretaria da Mulher, in turn, had been a demand of the Movimento das Mulheres Trabalhadoras do Brejo, under the leadership of Maria da Penha Nascimento (Lavinas and Cappellin 1991: 39). According to Ligia Albuquerque and Isaura Rufino (1987: 324-25) among the demands of the MMTR-Brejo was for recognition of women’s land rights, specifically, that land under the agrarian reform be jointly titled to couples.

The demand for women’s land rights was also raised in the South in this period. In the text drafted in preparation for a rural women worker’s congress in Rio Grande do Sul in 1986,

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10 On the heterogeneity within the union structure affiliated with CONTAG see Maybury-Lewis (1996). By the end of the military dictatorship the STRs and state federations were differentiated by either being assistencialista (concerned primarily with the delivery of social services), corrupt (pelayo), or combative. It was the latter who affiliated to the CUT.

11 Interview with researcher Paola Cappellin, of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, and former advisor to the CUT on gender issues, 1 March 1999, Amherst, MA.
organized by the group known as “the Margaridas”\textsuperscript{12} (after the slain Northeast union leader, Margarida Alves) it was proposed “que o título de propriedade distribuído no decorrer da reforma agrária seja concedido nominalmente ao casal, não importando seu estado conjugal ou legal...” Moreover, “se a família é o criterio para seleção dos beneficiarios da reforma agrária que sejam reconhecidos os direitos à propiedade e aos benefícios da RA à mulher chefe de família (viúva, separada, mãe solteira e a seus filhos), como também aos jovens, tanto homen como mulher...” (MEMTR 1986: section 2.4).

The CNDM, working in tandem with the growing rural women's movement, was largely responsible for the enhanced state attention to rural women's issues in the mid-1980s.\textsuperscript{13} EMBRATER, the rural extension service of the Ministry of Agriculture, organized the first National Congress of Rural Women in 1986, a congress building on a series of previous state and municipal-level meetings of rural women throughout the country.\textsuperscript{14} At this congress the demand for the distribution of agrarian reform land to female household heads and for the joint titling of agrarian reform land to couples was put forth by almost all of the regional working groups, but most forcefully by the women from the Northeast region. It recommended:

"Que haja igualdade de direitos no uso e posse de terra. No momento em que chegar a reforma agrária, que a terra seja distribuída sem discriminação, para homens e mulheres que queiram trabalhar, que não seja excluída a mulher chefe de família, as separadas, as mães solteiras;” (in EMBRATER 1986: 16).

In 1988 CONTAG held its Primeiro Seminario Nacional das Trabalhadoras Rurais in Brasilia.

\textsuperscript{12} In this period, there were three different organizations of rural women in this state, the Margaridas; the women affiliated with the dominant union structure, FETAG-RS; and the Organização das Mulheres da Roça which eventually would become the MMTR-RS (Bruner 2000:21). Some of the members of the Margaridas eventually joined one of the two latter groups. E-mail communications to the author from Loiva Rubenich, ANMTR, 14 December 2000, and Sonilda Pereira, FETAG-RS, 18 December 2000.

\textsuperscript{13} In 1985 a special program, the Programa de Apoio a Mulher Rural was created in the Ministry of Agriculture and the next year, the Comissão de Apoio a Mulher Trabalhadora Rural was created in MINRAD, the Ministerio da Reforma Agrária e Desenvolvimento (Siqueira 1991: 63). These offices were closed during the subsequent government of President Collor.

\textsuperscript{14} My perusal of the available relatorios of these meetings suggests that they were held between 1984-86 and that the initial themes were quite vague, focusing on “the situation of women workers” and their recognition as agriculturalists. Land rights were only addressed immediately preceding the 1986 National Congress, when the theme “mulher e a questão fundiaria” was introduced in some of the state-level encontros. For example, see “A Mulher Rural e suas Reinvidicacoes,” EMBRATER-SC (n.d.), files of Maria Jose Carneiro, researcher at the CPDA- UFRJ.
Women’s land rights were clearly articulated in the working groups in the following terms: “O direito de posse é negado aos trabalhadores em geral e as mulheres não têm acesso aos títulos de terra e assentamento;” moreover, it was denounced that “quando a mulher fica viúva e despejada da terra (as posseiras, assalariadas e assentadas)” (CONTAG 1988: 7). The constitutional convention was meeting at the time, and the seminar sent a “Documento de Reivindicação aos Constituintes,” asking that the following point (among others) approved in the first round of voting, be maintained in the final round: “Pt. 5: O título de domínio e a concessão de uso serão conferidos ao homem ou à mulher, ou a ambos, independentemente do estado civil (art. 194)” (Ibid.: 24).

It is as a result of all these meetings, seminars and congresses, and the interaction between the CNDM and the female leadership of the unions and the growing movement of rural women, that a number of gender-progressive propositions were placed before the constitutional convention in 1988. Besides the already noted article that stipulated that land distributed through the agrarian reform could be titled in the name of a man, woman, or both, other gains for rural women included the establishment of equal rights for urban and rural men and women with respect to labor legislation and social security benefits. It was clearly laid out that these benefits applied to permanent and temporary wage workers as well as family farmers, including unpaid family workers. These benefits include, besides the right to unemployment and disability insurance, 120 days of paid maternity leave for women. In addition, the age of retirement for rural women was set at 55 years and for rural men, at 60 years, or after 30 years of service for women and 35 years for men, conditions more favorable than for urban workers. Women who were unpaid family workers in peasant production would be eligible for retirement benefits directly and no longer only as a dependent of the male household head (Suarez and Libardoni 1992: 124-125; CUT 1991:10).

The new constitutional rights acquired by rural women in 1988 required enabling legislation to be implemented. But with the election of President Collor in 1989, the CNDM went into a period of decline (Barsted 1994: 42). Moreover, he vetoed in 1991 the implementing legislation for paid maternity leave for women in family agriculture, arguing that in the case of "special producers" there was no correlation between their payment of quotas and potential benefits (Cappellin 1992: 59). Since attaining effective social security rights was an issue that united most rural women (whether temporary or permanent wage workers, landless or in the family farming regime) it is not surprising that these rights would constitute the most important arena of struggle for the rural women's movement, to the detriment of the struggle for women’s land rights.

Rural women's paid maternity leave, together with the need for recognition of the occupation of rural women workers and the right to retirement benefits, remained among the main demands of rural women at state congresses of the federations affiliated with CONTAG in the early 1990s, at the First National Meeting of Rural Women Workers of CONTAG in 1991, and at the Fifth CONTAG Congress of that same year. The need to incorporate more women into the unions as well as in the leadership also remained important issues. New issues taken up in this period, reflecting the growing feminist discourse by women within the unions, included the problems of
the double day and the demand for sexual freedom (Siqueira 1991: 70-71). Among the demands made by the agrarian reform commission at the Fifth CONTAG Congress (where women now constituted 10 percent of the delegates), besides a strongly worded demand for the deepening of the agrarian reform, was that women be given land titles in their own names, or jointly with their spouse or partner, suggesting that women’s land rights were not being ignored all together (Suárez and Libardoni 1992: 135-36).

In 1989 the CUT organized its first national meeting on the Questão da Mulher Trabalhadora which included both urban and rural women. The next year it organized a Rural Women's Commission linked to its Departamento Nacional de Trabalhadores Rurais to better address what was considered to be the low participation of rural women in its affiliated unions and the general lack of recognition of rural women as workers (CUT 1991: 23-24). Among the main demands of rural women at the Second National Meeting of Women Workers of the CUT in 1991 were the implementation of retirement benefits for rural women, a call for recognition of the profession of rural women workers, and that women's names appear on agrarian reform land titles (Godinho 1995: 165), suggesting that they too continued to give importance to attaining women’s effective land rights.

In order to foster the participation of women in the unions, the CUT approved the adoption of a quota system in 1993, so that 30 percent of national, state, and regional leaders be women. The first leadership under the new quota system was elected at its 1994 Congress with nine women elected among the thirty-two national leaders (Godinho 1996: 52). A decision was also made at this congress to fuse the Rural Department of CUT with CONTAG, if CONTAG agreed to join the CUT, a move subsequently taken. This led to the Rural Women's Commission of the CUT being disbanded at the national level, leading to several years of chaos and a weakening in the work with rural women.

The Movimentos das Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais and the Construction of the ANMTR

Alongside the growth of the participation of women in the rural union movement, the eighties and nineties were characterized by the growth of the autonomous rural women's movement, the MMTRs, in many states. The MMTRs emerged in the mid-1980s in both the South and the Northeast at approximately the same time. For example, state-level, founding meetings of the autonomous rural women worker associations were held in the following years: in 1984 in Santa Catarina; in 1985 in Paraná; in 1986 in Paraíba; in 1987 in Pernambuco and Espírito Santo; and in

15 A quota was considered necessary for in 1989 women represented only seven percent of rural union leaders, and 60 percent of the rural unions affiliated with the CUT had directorates which were all male. Moreover, in the national leadership there were only two women out of thirty-two members (Godinho 1996: 49).

16 Interview by the author and Magdalena León with Lena Lavinhas, researcher at IPEA and former advisor to the CUT on gender issues, 18 June 1998, Rio de Janeiro.
The strong ties between members of the MMTR-Northeast and the rural unions are illustrated by the following. At the 1st Encontro in 1987, of the 22 rural women workers participating (the other 14 were advisors), 20 belonged to a union. A survey of the MMTR-NE membership carried out in that year (with 181 members responding from six states) revealed that 52 percent were union members (MMTR-NE 1987: 9, 21-2).

The state-level MMTRs were often formed by women who were members of unions affiliated to CONTAG or the CUT and who felt the need to create their own space to deal with gender issues and women's concerns. Although some women rose to leadership positions within the rural unions and in other movements, such as the MST, they often became frustrated when their gender-specific demands were considered irrelevant or less important than the class-based, economic demands which motivated many of these organizations.

In the context of the democratic opening of the mid-1980s, a national meeting of autonomous rural women was held in 1986 in Barueri, São Paulo (supported by the CUT and the MST), with the objective of creating a national organization of rural women workers. At the meeting, which was attended by women from sixteen states, it was decided that such a national organization was premature, and that efforts should concentrate on creating regional networks (MMTR-NE 1987; MMTR 1994: 47; ANMTR 1997: 10). This meeting was a catalyst to the organization of both the MMTR-NE and the AIMTR-Sul (Articulação das Instancias das Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais dos 5 Estados do Sul).

In the Northeast, the MMTRs in Pernambuco and Paraíba had begun collaborating in 1985, and the next year women from the former state attended the first state-level meeting of MMTR-Paraíba in Guarabira. A detailed history of the founding of the MMTR-NE gives credit to the 1986 São Paulo national meeting (which six women from the Northeast attended) as providing the impetus for the First Encontro of the MMTR-NE at João Pessoa in 1987 (MMTR-NE 1987). This meeting was attended by women from eight Northeastern states and in each of these, the MMTRs were closely tied to the rural unions at the municipal level. Two themes dominated the discussion: the need to increase women’s participation in the unions and the demand for agrarian reform.

In the south, the AIMTR-Sul was created in 1988, formally linking women from the five southern states. Its objective was to "discutir as ‘questões específicas da mulher: Saúde, ________________

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18 The AIMTR included the following organizations: Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais do Rio Grande do Sul (MMTR-RS), Movimento de Mulheres Agricultoras de Santa Catarina (MMA-SC), Comissão Estadual da Questão da Mulher Trabalhadora Rural do DETR-Paraná, Movimento Popular de Mulheres do Paraná (MPMP), Movimento de Mulheres
Sexualidade, Reconhecimento da Profissão, Produção, Reprodução, Gênero...dar visibilidade à problemática das mulheres trabalhadoras rurais (sua condição de vida, trabalho, falta de cidadania...) (ANMTR 1997: 10). The AIMTR-Sul and its constituent organizations were the ones to take the lead in subsequent national campaigns focusing on obtaining rural women's social security rights and the recognition of the profession of rural women workers.19

Before the adoption of the 1988 Federal Constitution, some of the state-level MMTRs had raised the issue of women’s land rights in municipal meetings. For example, in the 25 municipal encontros held in Santa Catarina in 1986 one of the themes had been “a luta pelo Título de Posse da Terra en nome das mulheres em projetos de assentamentos” (ANMTR 1997: 5). Subsequently, land rights seem to disappear as an issue. According to Lucy Choinaski, one of the founders of the MMA-SC and the first rural woman to be elected a congressional deputy, this was because the organization was largely made up by women who were small farmers and their primary concerns were other ones, such as health care, social security benefits, participation in the unions, etc. In the regime of family agriculture “a terra tá no nome do homem...difcilmente a filha ganha uma herança de um pedaço de terra...a questão da terra, ela nunca foi colocada como uma questão prioritária da própria discussão...Nunca foi um debate apesar que as mulheres já vem se preocupando, levantando tambem essa questão de direito à posse da terra.20

In São Paulo, as well, at the first meeting of the Movimento de Mulheres Assentadas de São Paulo one of the main concerns had been: “Quando a terra foi conquistada, as mulheres conquistaram conjuntamente o direito de ter Vez e Voz, o direito de voto nas Assembléias, o respeito dos companheiros, e que constasse na Carta de Anuência o nome da mulher, bem como o de seus filhos menores” (ANMTR 1997: 7). After 1988, most of the state-level organizations focused their priorities on making rural women’s work visible so that they would be considered rural workers and be eligible for social security benefits and increasingly on explicitly feminist issues, such as reproductive health care and ending domestic violence.21

In Agricultoras de Mato Grosso do Sul, and the Movimento de Mulheres Assentadas de São Paulo.

19 Interview with Jaci Kuhn Sckeeren, member of the Comissão Nacional of the ANMTR, 23 June 1998, Brasilia. The MMA-SC led the 1986 campaign for 100,000 signatures of rural women workers to place their rights on the constitutional agenda, delivering these to Brasilia in a major caravan (ANMTR 1997: 5).

20 Interview by Maria Ignez Paulilo, researcher at UFSC, 26 July 2000, Florianopolis, SC; unpublished transcript made available to the author. The reference, cited earlier, to women’s land rights as a demand of rural women in this state may be due to the fact that EMBRATER explicitly introduced this theme at the seminars held here preceding the 1986 First National Congress of Rural Women.

21 An exception in the North is the organization of the Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu which began forming in the late 1980s. In 1991 250 women from four states (Maranhão, Pará,
In partnership with the CUT's Rural Women's Commission, the AIMTR-Sul organized a major campaign around the 1991 population census to have rural women declare themselves as rural workers instead of as housewives or unpaid family workers in the questionnaire (Lavinas 1991:4). This campaign was launched with a caravan of a thousand or so rural women from fifteen states marching on Brasilia for International Women's Day celebrations in March 1992. Among their other demands were that Collor's veto of paid maternity leave for unpaid family workers be overturned. In addition, they demanded that i) retirement benefits be paid immediately to rural workers; ii) child care centers be set up for rural women workers; iii) priority attention be given to women’s integral health care; iv) an end be brought to violence against women; and v) that the constitutional provision for agrarian reform be regulated (Cappellin 1992: 59; Suárez and Libardoni 1992: 132). The AIMTR-Sul also established an office in Brasilia to lobby for paid maternity leave and was eventually successful in getting the national congress to pass the bill in 1993 (ANMTR 1997: 5).

In 1995 another national meeting was held in São Paulo to create a national-level network of rural women, the Articulação Nacional de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais (ANMTR). This meeting brought together women from seventeen states and this time they succeeded in creating a loosely-structured, national organization. Among the resolutions passed at this meeting was to focus on actions to guarantee the “direitos conquistados” such as previdencia and health care, and to carry out coordinated actions under one theme on March 8th, international women’s day. Their primary activity has been a national campaign, the Campanha de Documentos Mulheres Rurais, under the slogan: "To have personal documents and those of workers is but one step in the conquest of our citizenship" (ANMTR 1997: 26-7). Of an estimated 18.5 million rural women workers, only some three million currently have their profession officially recognized, a precondition for them to be eligible for social security benefits (ANMTR, n.d.).

Piauí and Tocantins) held their Primeiro Encontro Inter-estadual in São Luis. From its initiation this organization has focused on land rights, principally access to the palm groves on latifundia which form the basis of their livelihood (Veras Sales: 1995: 129-135). The cutting down of these by landlords to make way for pasture has been the source of much violence, as well as protest by women. In states such as Maranhão, quebradeiras form a good number if not the majority of the women affiliated with the MMTRs at the municipal level.

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22 The number of documents required for official transactions in Brazil is no small matter. Necessary personal documents include: a birth certificate; a marriage certificate; an identity card; a voter registration card; and a carteira do trabalho (employment card). A birth certificate is required to obtain any of the other personal documents (ANMTR 1997: 6-11). In addition, in order to have one's profession registered and thus, to be eligible for social security benefits, requires at least one of the following: a union card; a land title (or INCRA certification that one's name is on the registry of an assentamento); a rental contract for land; registration in the bloco de notas; income tax registration; or a sales declaration form (Ibid.: 12-20). ANMTR's campaign materials stress the importance of women having their name on land titles as both a means and an ends of citizenship (Ibid.: 13).
The Movimento Sem Terra

The MST was born in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in the late 1970s around a series of land occupations. By the early 1980s these occupations had spread to the South, Southeast, Center-West and reached into the Northeast (Fernandes 1996: 66-7). The origins of the movement are found in the CEBs which had proliferated in rural areas and shanty towns beginning in the 1960s in concert with liberation theology. The land invasions which grew out of the conscientização process spurred by the CEBs were supported by the CPT, which increasingly publicized and gave coherence to these struggles. The CPT also played a crucial role in bringing landless workers together from different states. After a series of regional meetings, the first national meeting, one that resulted in the founding of the MST, was held in 1984 in Cascavel, Paraná (Ibid.: 70-78; Stedile and Fernandes 1999: 31-56).

Today the MST is organized in twenty-two states and is the leading force in the struggle for agrarian reform. The number of land occupations which it has led increased nationwide in the early 1990s, some 342 between 1990-1995, with over 100,000 families participating; the number of occupations escalated again beginning in 1995. In that latter year there were 101 acampamentos, with 31,619 families awaiting INCRA to adjudicate land to them.23

Since its founding, the primary objective of the MST has been the struggle for agrarian reform and “uma sociedade justa e igualitária.” The movement recognized that to accomplish this, “a participação de todos os trabalhadores rurais” was necessary “...estimulando a participação das mulheres em todos os níveis” (MST 1986: 44; Navarro 1996: 98). Women have been very visible in the MST-led land occupations, where they are estimated to be between one-third to one-half of the participants, and they are often in the front lines in confrontations with the police. Moreover, women usually play a very active and key role in the acampamentos that result from these. Nonetheless, once the assentamentos are constituted, few women participate as actively and, until recently, there have been few women in the leadership of the assentamentos or of the MST:

“Todavia, observamos que, depois da conquista da terra, nos assentamentos, um grande numero de mulheres volta a fazer apenas trabalho interno, na roça, em casa ou com as crianças. Por isso, e necessario que as mulheres se organizem e participem da luta da classe trabalhadora em todas as suas instancias...”24

In its initial years, the MST gave little concern to gender issues: “A partir da fala das assentadas, percebe-se que as relações de gênero são consideradas no Movimento como de

23 Data provided to the author by the MST National Office, São Paulo, 30 June 1998.

24 Comissão Nacional de Mulheres do MST, “Avançar na luta,” Journal Sem Terra (São Paulo), No. 72, April, 1988: 18.
segunda ordem, quando não uma coisa que atrapalha” (Lechat 1992: 108). Nonetheless, a Comissão Nacional de Mulheres do MST was organized in the latter half of the 1980s and it lobbied for women’s nucleos to be created within the assentamentos and acampamentos; for a women’s commission to be created within each state; and for the state-level Executivas and Comissões de Assentados to support the organization of women within the movement.\(^{25}\)

Most of these proposals were adopted as norms at various encontros nacionais so that in September 1989, when the MST published the first edition of its *Normas Gerais do MST* it included a chapter on “Da Articulação das Mulheres.” Besides the objective of “estimular a participação das mulheres en todos os níveis de atuação, em todas as instâncias de poder, e de representatividade,” other objectives were to:

“-combater todo e qualquer tipo de discriminação às mulheres, em todas as atividades do movimento, e lutar contra o machismo em todas as manifestações que impeçam a igualdade de direitos e condições das mulheres trabalhadoras.

-...estimular a organização de comissões de mulheres dentro do movimento dos sem terra, nos assentamentos e nos acampamentos, para discussão dos seus problemas específicos.

-...estimular para que as mulheres sem terra participem ativamente das comissões e demais formas de organização do Movimento das Trabalhadoras Rurais, que se articula dentro do movimento sindical, juntando todas as mulheres trabalhadoras rurais, independente da categoria...

-a nível nacional deve funcionar uma equipe de mulheres do MST...[para] pensar, propor e planejar políticas específicas para a organização das mulheres sem terra..” (MST 1989: chpt. 8).

Training manuals for the 1989 to 1993 period stress the importance of increasing women’s participation and that to do so it was important to “criar condições para que as mulheres e jovens participem em atividades coletivas da produção e consigam participar das atividades do Movimento,” the first implicit reference to some of the impediments that might limit women’s more active participation.\(^{26}\) But throughout this period, no particular attention was given to women’s land rights.

This lack of attention was due to several factors. The provisions for agrarian reform in the 1988 Constitution were considerably weaker than the legislation encompassed in the 1985 National Agrarian Reform Plan of the New Republic (PNRA-NR), legislation which the landlord’s lobby, the União Democrática Ruralista (UDR) successfully watered down in this intervening period. After 1988, the lobbying efforts of the MST and other progressive forces focused on

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

attaining favorable implementing legislation for the limited range of expropriations allowed under the constitution. In addition, under the Collor government (1990-1992), not one estate was expropriated for being in the social interest, and actions under the subsequent government of Itamar Franco (1992-1994) were also minimal, leading the MST to step up its land occupations (Medeiros 1989: 166-98).

The lack of attention by the MST to women’s land rights, particularly, to the joint adjudication and titling of land to couples, is also related to fact that throughout this period a priority of the MST was the collective adjudication and titling of land, rather than its division and formal distribution to individual families: “A titulação das terras deverá ser coletiva en nome de todos os assentados, independentemente de existirem grupos coletivos ou produtores individuais, garantindo a concessão de uso vitalicio, mas que o título seja inegociavel.”27 With the struggle for land rights defined as a collective issue, there was little room for discussion of the individual land rights of women.

Rather than being strengthened, the Comissão Nacional de Mulheres do MST apparently ceased to function after 1989 as women were told that if they were interested in gender issues they should join other organizations, such as the MMTR.28 Gender issues were seen as divisive issues for the movement, particularly at a moment (during the Collor government) when the struggle for agrarian reform was becoming even more contentious, and in some cases, violent. The primary concern was for the unity of the movement—a struggle which demanded unity from all family members.29

The fear that gender issues would be divisive to the movement is evident in a 1993 document that states explicitly that the incorporation of women into the movement should be treated as a class issue and not as a gender issue. According to Article 45 of the 1993 “Documento Basico,” the movement should “considerar as questões especificas das mulheres e sua participação como parte integrante das reivindicações e da organização, tratando como classe e não enquanto gênero” (MST 1996: 5) But in Article 152 of this same document it was reiterated that since it was an objective of the movement to encourage women’s role in production and their participation in cooperatives it was also necessary to “combater as desigualdades e o traicionalismo que existe no meio campones” (Ibid.: 6)

27 Ibid.: Item 105.


29 Interview by the author and Magdalena León with Nalu Faria and Miriam Nobre, SOF (Sempreviva Organização Feminista), 27 June 1998, São Paulo.
The movement went a step further in recognizing the specificity of gender subordination in its Agrarian Program of 1995, approved at the Third National Congress. A section was devoted to “A situação da mulher no campo,” which included recognition that it was often women who suffered the most from the “pessimas condições de vida” in the countryside, including the double day: “Acrescido a isso encontra-se uma condição generalizada de preconceitos e discriminações pela pratica do machismo no meio rural, que sumete a mulher a uma condição inferior” (MST 1996: 6). The general objective regarding gender equality adopted at this congress was similar to previous statements: “Combater todas as formas de discriminação social e buscar a participação igualitaria da mulher” (Ibid.).

Several MST women leaders participated in the organization of the founding meeting of the ANMTR in late 1995. They consider that there was a qualitative leap forward within the MST with respect to the discussion of gender issues after this meeting. They organized the first national meeting of MST women militants shortly thereafter, leading to the founding of the Coletivo Nacional de Mulheres do MST in May 1996. The Coletivo soon published a pamphlet, "The Question of Women in the MST" with the subtitle, "Participating without fear of being a woman"! This document clearly points to the gap in MST theory and practice, highlighting how women were not sufficiently represented in the leadership. Moreover, although a basic principle of the movement since 1989 had been to end the discrimination against women and to promote their participation, it concludes that this had not been achieved in practice (MST 1996: 3-5).

In this publication, women’s land rights are directly addressed for the first time. Among the proposed actions, is that the organization “garantir que as mulheres tenham título da terra”; and “garantir a participação nas associações e cooperativas em nivel de igualdade” (Ibid.: 7). It was stressed that a major campaign was necessary if women’s names were to be secured, along with their husbands/partners, in the assentamento cadastro and on land titles, to assure that women had the personal documents to qualify as beneficiaries. Hence, they recommended that the movement strongly support and participate in the documentation campaign being organized at that time by the ANMTR (Ibid.: 9-10).

This brief review of the issue of gender and land rights within the rural social movements up through the mid-1990s suggests the following points. Most of the credit for raising the issue of women’s access to land within the agrarian reform rests with women within the leadership of the

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31 Interview with Itelvina Maria Masioli, member of the MST National Directorate from Mato Grosso and one of two MST representatives in the national commission of the ANMTR, at a national seminar of the ANMTR, 23 June 1998, Brasilia.

32 The Coletivo also organized the first women-only meetings at this time, such as the Conference on Peasant Women in Rural Struggles, held in Cajamar, São Paulo, in June 1996 (Petras 1997: 20-21).
rural unions, both CONTAG and CUT. Their efforts, combined with the organizational activity of rural women within the local, state and regional-level MMTRs and that of the state (at the prodding of the CNDR), largely explain why women’s land rights became an issue in the period preceding the constitutional reform. That they were successful in obtaining women’s formal land rights in the 1988 constitution is largely due to the coalition of women within the state and political parties working in concert with a unified urban and rural women’s movement in support of attaining women’s rights in the constitution. Women’s formal land rights in the agrarian reform were achieved as a by-product of the effort to end discrimination against women in all its dimensions.

Achieving formal land rights, however, is a necessary but not sufficient condition to obtain women’s land rights in practice. In the post-constitutional reform period this was stymied by the relatively broad agenda of the MMTRs and the priority placed on attaining women’s social security rights, a priority reflecting its own heterogenous class composition and the fact that this issue could potentially benefit and thus unite all rural women. While both CONTAG and CUT continued to give attention to the issue of women’s land rights and the need for implementing regulations to make these effective, the struggle for agrarian reform in this period was largely led by the MST. And of the three rural social movements which had arisen in the 1980s, the MST was the only one not to have recognized the importance of women’s individual land rights within the agrarian reform. Taken together, these factors largely explain why women were such a relatively low share of the beneficiaries of agrarian reform in the mid-1990s.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE AGRARIAN REFORM

According to the 1 Censo da Reforma Agraria, as of 1996, only 19,905 women were direct beneficiaries of the reform, representing 12.6 percent of the national total of 157,757 (see Table 1). This relatively low share reflects, among other factors, the discrimination against women which prevailed prior to the 1988 constitutional reform and the fact that it was not eliminated by measures to establish women’s formal equality with men. The 1964 Estatuto da Terra, the governing legislation on agrarian reform until 1985, gave priority to household heads with the largest families who wanted to dedicate themselves to agricultural activities (in Luz 1996: 123). These criteria discriminated against women since, following cultural norms, if a man resides in the household he is always considered its head, a norm supported by the 1916 civil code until also modified by the 1988 constitutional reform (Albuquerque and Rufino 1987: 324-25).

The family size criterion was biased against female-headed households, since, by definition these are smaller than male-headed households, given the absence of an adult male in the former. Moreover, in selecting beneficiaries, INCRA applied a point system whereby men between the ages of 18 to 60 were awarded one point whereas women in this age group were awarded only 0.75 points, with the discrimination by sex maintained for children. This norm obviously discriminated against female-headed households as well as those households with large numbers
of female children. The criteria regarding the length of experience in agricultural work discriminated against all women since women’s agricultural work—whether as unpaid family labor or temporary wage workers—has largely been invisible and undervalued, and it has been difficult for women to prove their agricultural experience (Ibid.; Siqueira 1991: 63; Suárez and Libardoni 1992: 118-19; also see Paulilo 1996).

The discrimination against women was such that INCRA functionaries assumed that women without a husband or partner were incapable of managing a farm unless they had a grown son, and it was not at all uncommon for women who found themselves widowed with young children to lose their right to remain in an agrarian reform settlement (Lavinias 1991: 6). Moreover, when a widow’s eldest son was named the beneficiary she sometimes lost access to land when he married and formed his own household (Rufino and Albuquerque 1990: 367).

The main consequence of the constitutional reform establishing that women could be beneficiaries of the agrarian reform was an INCRA norm (SEASC 01 of October 1988) which provided for equal weight to be given to male and female labor in the point system utilized to select beneficiaries (Suárez and Libardoni 1992: 119). The other beneficiary selection criteria were not changed, thus female household heads continued to be discriminated against by the criteria favoring large families, and all women, by the criteria favoring agricultural experience.

Given this trajectory of discrimination, one would expect the great majority of female beneficiaries to be found on assentamentos formed since 1988, when the Federal Constitution explicitly made women potential beneficiaries of the agrarian reform. As Table 2 shows, the largest share of female beneficiaries, 47.4 percent, reside on assentamentos formed in the 1991-96 period. However, the largest share of men (48.6 percent) also reside on assentamentos formed in this latter period. This suggests that the constitutional provisions guaranteeing women’s formal land rights have had little direct impact in increasing the relative participation of women as reform beneficiaries.

As Table 1 also shows, there was considerable variation in women’s participation by region, with the share of female beneficiaries highest in the Southeast (13.8 percent) and Northeast (13.4

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33 In the analysis of the First Agrarian Reform Census, I have excluded households where the sex of the beneficiary was not reported (2,841), leaving a potential sample size of 154,916. In Table 2, another 16,038 households (10 percent of the potential sample) were excluded because they either did not answer this question or reported that their assentamento was formed after the year in which the census was taken. This census should be used with a great deal of caution since the completed questionnaires were not always subject to rigorous scrutiny by field supervisors. There is a further problem in the interpretation of the query, “ano de ocupação do assentamento” which could refer to the year of the very first land occupation (or when the community was originally settled) rather than the year in which the assentamento was legally constituted or when the beneficiary acquired land rights. The responses to “occupations” before 1964 were concentrated in Ceará, Maranhão, Minas Gerais, Piauí, and Sergipe.
percent), and lowest in the South (7.9 percent) and Central-West (11.5 percent). There was considerable variation in women’s participation not only by region, but also by states within a given region, particularly in the North and Northeast. Both of these regions had states exhibiting among the highest as well as lowest female share of beneficiaries. In order to explain this large state-level variation in the share of female beneficiaries, I tested several hypotheses quantitatively.

Since INCRA’s practice has been to adjudicate land rights to only one person per household—the household head—and given wide-spread cultural practices that privilege men as heads if they reside in the household, I expected the variation in the share of female beneficiaries to be highly correlated with the share of rural female household heads by state. As Table 3 shows, the correlation by state between the share of female beneficiaries and female households heads is positive (.3031), but not as strong as expected. Another criterion for selection of beneficiaries is their agricultural experience. Thus, I expected the share of female beneficiaries to be higher in those states with a high female participation rate in the agricultural economically active population (EAP). As Table 3 shows, this variable turns out to be negatively correlated (-0.20695) with the share of female beneficiaries by state, suggesting that either female agricultural participation rates are not captured very well by census estimates, or that this criterion is not very important in the beneficiary selection process. Since not all those enumerated among the agricultural EAP are potential candidates for agrarian reform efforts (since this figure includes family farmers, unpaid family workers, temporary wage workers and permanent wage workers), the share of women among temporary agricultural workers may be a better measure, one that captures both agricultural experience and the potential demand for land by women. It too is negatively correlated (-0.0340) with the share of female beneficiaries by state.

I also expected the share of female beneficiaries by state to be negatively correlated with female migration rates from rural areas and hence to vary inversely with rural sex ratios by state. Moreover, higher masculinity ratios (reflecting either relatively greater female out-migration and/or higher net male in-migration) might also be associated with intense competition for land among men, leading to the exclusion of women as beneficiaries. However, as Table 3 shows, the correlation coefficient (0.1797) for the sex ratio variable is also of the wrong sign. Another variable which might capture the exclusion effect—of where there is great competition for land among men—are land prices, since land prices (the mean value of cultivable land) reflect the degree to which land is a valued good. The correlation between female participation and land

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34 This hypothesis is supported by Botta Ferrantes’ (1995) work among boías-frias in São Paulo.

35 Support for this hypothesis comes from studies on inheritance practices in Brazil which tend to portray these as patrilineal, with land usually passed from fathers to sons. More gender-equitable inheritance practices have been associated with the decline of family agriculture, where agriculture is no longer a viable activity (Carneiro et al., 1998; Carneiro 2001). It is also based on the observation that where agriculture is in decline and land not worth much, women are often still interested in obtaining land for the security which it offers them to provide a portion of their
prices by state is, indeed, negative (-.2284) but not substantial.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this quantitative analysis is that the variation in the share of female beneficiaries by state is positively, but weakly correlated with the share of rural female household heads, and negatively, but weakly correlated to variations in land prices by state. Obviously, the role of factors which are not easily measured must be large, such as variations in the policies and attitudes of INCRA and of the different social movements by state, and the extent to which the latter have internalized principles of gender equity and specifically, recognition of the importance of women’s land rights.

In order to pursue these questions, during 2000 I carried out interviews with the leaders of the rural social movements and INCRA officials in seven states: four northeastern states, two characterized by high female participation in the agrarian reform (Pernambuco and Paraíba) and two with low female participation (Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte); two southern states with low female participation (Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná); and Rio de Janeiro, characterized by the highest share of female participation in the agrarian reform of all states.

The leaders of the social movements in all states considered INCRA functionaries to play the determining role in the selection of agrarian reform beneficiaries, for it is INCRA that determines their eligibility and through a point system prioritizes those to be settled on each assentamento. In contrast, in interviews, INCRA officials stressed the role of the social movements as the key filter in determining this selection, particularly since the early 1990s when the pace of the agrarian reform has largely been determined by land occupations and the pressure of those within the acampamentos. It is acknowledged that participation in the latter has become a precondition for beneficiary status.

As previously noted, it is INCRA policy to bestow land rights on only one person per household, generally, the household head. Through 2000 there was no general INCRA directive on joint adjudication and titling of land to couples. As INCRA officials often state, justifying this policy, “no cadastro não tem espaço para por o nome do homem e da mulher, so tem espaço para por o nome do homem.” As leaders of the social movements conclude, “então o proprio INCRA

family’s subsistence requirements; in contrast, in such circumstances, men often opt for non-agricultural occupations. Interview with Silvia Camurça and Ana Paola Portella, SOS Corpo, 20 September 2000, Recife.

36 Nonetheless, since 1998 it is official INCRA policy to try to break the “monopólio do cadastramento e seleção de beneficiários exercido por movimentos sociais específicos em algumas regiões do país, que impede o pleno exercício do direito democrático de acesso á reforma agrária” (INCRA 1998). During 2000 INCRA introduced a new modality—by mail registration— for applying to become an agrarian reform beneficiary, with the forms available at all post offices throughout the country.
According to INCRA officials, the goal of the agrarian reform is to benefit families and by
benefitting families—as represented by the household head—they are benefitting all the members
within them. Moreover, they tend to assume that the families to be benefitted are predominantly
nuclear families, where both parents are present. These assumptions have worked to the
detriment of female-headed households as well as youth.

The First Agrarian Reform Census again sheds light on this matter. Surprisingly, the great
majority, 58.9 percent, of the female beneficiaries were married or living in a consensual union.
As Table 4 shows, only 41 percent are presumably female household heads. Among this group,
widows predominate (16.7 percent of the total), followed by single (9.3 percent), separated (9.3
percent), and divorced women (1.4 percent). In contrast, the overwhelming majority of men are
married or living in a consensual union, 82.5 percent; only 10.1 percent are single with the
remainder widowed, separated, or divorced.

The data on marital status suggests that female household heads have been severely under-
represented as beneficiaries. Nationally, women represent 12.2 percent of rural household heads
(Brasil 1994: Table 6.11), whereas they constitute only 5.2 percent of the household heads on the
assentamentos censussed in 1996. This under-representation suggests that female household
heads have been particularly discriminated against and also explains why, in the quantitative
analysis presented above, female household headship by state is positively, but only weakly
correlated with the share of female agrarian reform beneficiaries.

As Table 5 shows, the only states where there is some correspondence between the share of
female household heads on the assentamentos and their representation within the rural population

37 Interview with Isabel Greem, MST-Paraná, 14 November 2000, Curitiba. This same
point was made by Nina Tonin, MST coordinator in Rio Grande do Sul and a member of the
MST’s Comissão Nacional do Gênero, to the seminar “Políticas públicas sob a perspectiva de
gênero: trabalho e propriedade da terra no meio rural” organized by EMATER/RS and the
Coordenadoria Estadual da Mulher, Governo do Rio Grande do Sul, 8 November 2000. Also see

38 These assumptions were most apparent in my interview with José Carlos de Araujo
Vieira, INCRA Superintendente in Paraná, 13 November 2000. He was quite opposed to
including single people as beneficiaries on the assentamento, irrespective of sex, saying the goal of
the agrarian reform was to “fortalecer a familia.” Among the different social movements, the
MST has most strongly defended the inclusion of young, single people (who are usually active
participants in the land occupations and acampamentos), particularly in the context of the
collective adjudication of land. Interviews with Dulcineia Pavan, MST International Relations, 30
June 1998, São Paulo, and Fatima Rivera, MST coordinator in Rio Grande do Norte, 1 October
2000, Fortaleza.
are Roraima (where they are over-represented) and Mato Grosso do Sul, Mato Grosso, Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catarina and São Paulo. In thirteen states, the discrimination gap is large (with the share of female-headed households in the rural population being at least twice as large as the share on assentamentos). Of interest is that all nine Northeastern states are in this latter group, states where the large presence of female household heads is often considered to be the driving force behind the relatively high share of female reform beneficiaries.

This analysis suggests two points, first, that discrimination against female-headed households in the beneficiary selection process has continued irrespective of the 1988 constitutional provisions. And second, that the rural social movements have not championed their land rights very effectively, let alone, prioritized these. The general problem seems to be that INCRA continues to prefer to title a son (even if legally under-age) than to title a female household head, with single mothers often being asked “não tem um filho mais velho?” Moreover, if a male beneficiary dies, INCRA prefers to cede the land rights to the oldest son rather than to the widow and if a female household head with land rights gets married, these are sometimes transferred to her spouse (Rua and Abramovay 2000: 198-99).

An interesting question, then, is why— if for cultural reasons, men are usually considered to be the head of household-- the majority of female beneficiaries in the 1996 Agrarian Reform Census are married women or women living in a consensual union. My interviews as well as the existing studies on women in the assentamentos suggest that the main reason that married women appear on the cadastros as representing their family is because their husband or partner is for some reason ineligible to be a beneficiary of the reform (Rua and Abramovay 2000: 197).

Among the most important legal barriers in claiming beneficiary status (critérios eliminatórios) are i) having already been a beneficiary of the agrarian reform or colonization program; ii) having a criminal record; and iii) being physically or mentally handicapped to carry out agricultural work (INCRA 1998: Appendix). In such cases INCRA officials sometimes register the wife/partner as the beneficiary if the household is otherwise qualified.

In some states INCRA officials have added other criteria to the eligibility requirements, such

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39 Interview with Wellington Gurgel, acting Superintendente of INCRA-CE, 28 September 2000, Fortaleza. A notorious case was one in Paraíba where INCRA ceded land rights to the son of a well-known CUT activist rather than to her, even though she qualified as a beneficiary and was demanding land rights in her own name. Interview with Genro Ieno Neto, researcher at Unitrabalho-UFPB, and others, 23 September 2000, João Pessoa.

40 In only four states do female household heads constitute the majority of female beneficiaries: in Minas Gerais (54.9 percent); Paraná (61.6 percent); Rio de Janeiro (53.1 percent) and Santa Catarina (54.9 percent), with widows making up a large portion (one-third or more) of these.
as requiring that beneficiaries not be officially retired, hold an occupation other than being an agriculturalist, or absent themselves from the assentamento for a period longer than three months or so. In Northeastern states where men have traditionally migrated temporarily to the Southeast for months at a time, this has sometimes favored married women being ceded land rights, particularly when they are considered to be “viuvas de maridos vivos” (in effect, abandoned women). Personal characteristics have also been a factor such as where a husband prefers that the land be registered in the name of his wife because she is literate while he is not, or where the wife has all the relevant documentation whereas the husband does not. But these cases are the exception rather than the rule.

Married women have exerted their land rights under certain circumstances, such as in Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro, when they have been extremely active in land occupations while their partners have hardly played a role, the latter either being uninterested in pursuing an agricultural vocation and/or in the politics of the process. In most, but not all cases, the land rights are assigned to the woman who has struggled for the land. Another situation which appears less frequently is where the woman is considerably older than her partner and has vigorously

41 In the point system for selection of beneficiaries, candidates between 35-45 years of age are awarded 5 points, whereas those older than 56 are awarded only 1.5 (INCRA 1998: Appendix), thus those who are aposentados find incentive to register their wife/partner as the beneficiary.

42 In Paraíba it is reported that INCRA does not allow beneficiaries to migrate in search of work for any length of time at all, a factor which has sometimes encouraged land rights being ceded in the wife’s name so that the husband can continue to migrate seasonally. Interview with Françimar Fernandes, COAGRP-Projecto Lumiar, 25 September 2001, João Pessoa.

43 In this case the wives are, in effect, household heads and should be considered as such for census purposes. The fact that they continue to report their marital status as being married would lead to an underestimation of female household heads in both the population census and the agrarian reform census. Unfortunately, since the latter did not inquire if the spouse was living in the household (or usually so lives), we have no way to verify whether the number of women beneficiaries reporting that they are married is, in fact, overestimated.

44 For example, in the Assentamento de Açude Grande (zona da mata of Pernambuco) women were the cadastrada in fourteen out of the 47 households benefitted. Only two of these women were household heads, the others being wives or partners. These women ended up on the beneficiary lists, rather than their husbands or partners, because they were the ones who had participated in the land take-over and the subsequent acampamento. As in the case of the president of this association, “the companheiro did not agree with the land occupation, thus the land title is going to be hers, she has gained the right to it.” Interview by the author and Magdalena León with Nalva Josefa do Espirito Santo, president of the assentamento, 15 June 1998, Recife. On Rio de Janeiro, see Cappellin and Castro (1997), discussed subsequently.
demanded that her name appear on the cadastro.

Turning to the differences by state within a given region, one of the factors that drew my attention in the Northeast was the relatively high share of female reform beneficiaries in Pernambuco and Paraíba and the low share of these in neighboring Rio Grande do Norte and Ceará (see Table 1). As previously noted, compared to other regions, the Northeast is characterized by a high share of rural female household heads but even in this region, female household heads are under-represented among reform beneficiaries. However, they are less under-represented in Paraíba (7.4 percent) and Pernambuco (6.4 percent) than in Rio Grande do Norte (2.6 percent) and Ceará (4.9 percent). Another factor differentiating Pernambuco and Paraíba from Ceará in particular, but to a lesser extent Rio Grande do Norte, is the prevalence of sugar cane cultivation, an activity in which women have traditionally participated as temporary harvest workers. The data on the share of women in the temporary agricultural labor force are not all that helpful, however, in differentiating these states, probably because the agricultural census data tend to underestimate women’s agricultural participation.

I propose that a more important factor in explaining this intra-regional variation in the share of female beneficiaries, has to do with the role of the rural social movements and women’s participation within them. Recall from the previous section that it was precisely in Pernambuco and Paraíba where the earliest agitation took place, in the first half of the 1980s, to incorporate rural women into unions. Moreover, it was also in these two states where the demand for women’s land rights was voiced early on. While comparative quantitative data is not available on the extent of female unionization, in interviews, women were considered to be a relatively higher share of the union membership in Pernambuco and Paraíba, than in Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte, where female unionization is a phenomenon of the 1990s. Moreover, the struggle for agrarian reform in the Northeast in this period was primarily led by the rural unions and/or the CPT. The MST did not establish a presence in this region until the late 1980s, and did not begin

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45 Besides the references provided earlier, see Miele and Guimarães (1998: 239); and interviews with Vanete Almeida, advisor to MMTR-NE, 20 September 2000, Recife, and Inez Bassanez, former advisor to MMTR-Paraíba, 23 September 2000, João Pessoa.

46 This proposition was supported in interviews with Silvia Camurça and Ana Paola Portilla, op. cit.; Maria Aparecida Melo do Nascimento, coordinadora da Comissão Estadual da Mulher, FETAPE, 18 September 2000, Recife; Zildethe Rodriguez Vera and Maria Lourdes Pereira, directiva da FETRAECE, 28 September 2000, Fortaleza; Fatima Pessôa, Comissão Estadual da Mulher, FETARN, 3 October 2000, Natal; and Beatriz Heredia, researcher at IFICS/UFRJ, 19 October 2000, Rio de Janeiro. The only quantitative data which is available is for Pernambuco. In a sample of one-third of the base-level unions (170) in this state in 1997, women made up 43 percent of the members (data provided to the author and Magdalena León by the Assesoria de Comunicação da FETAPE, 17 June 1998).
to organize widespread land occupations until the mid-1990s.\textsuperscript{47} Hence, the variation in the share of female agrarian reform beneficiaries in these four states up to 1996 is more likely a reflection of the policies and different state-level trajectories of the rural unions, the MMTRs, and the CPT, rather than the MST.

The MMTRs also developed earlier in Pernambuco and Paraíba, than in Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte, and in the early 1990s the autonomous women’s movement was also much stronger in these two states than in the other two.\textsuperscript{48} Moreover, the symbiosis which exists between the MMTR and the rural unions at the local level in Pernambuco, and often in Paraíba, has probably contributed to empower rural women, placing them in a much better position to claim land rights when the opportunity presents itself.

While I was unable to establish with precision when the issue of women’s land rights was

during the late 1980s, the period when the CONTAG-affiliated federation also begins to take a more active role in these efforts. Interviews with Sonia Freite, CPT activist, 19 September, Recife, and Emilia Moreira, researcher at UFPA, 24 September, João Pessoa. In Ceará, the MST arrived in 1989, and only after a CUT-oriented chapa took over FETRAECE in 1992, did the union begin to get actively involved in agrarian reform efforts; today these two organizations vie for leadership of these efforts. In Rio Grande do Norte, the MST presence also dates from the late 1980s, but its presence is not as strong as in Ceará. Moreover, union efforts on behalf of the agrarian reform also appear weaker, with INCRA still dominating over the assentamentos in a panorama similar to that which characterized Ceará until the mid-1990s. Interviews with Gema Galvani, researcher at UFC, 26 September 2000; Fatima Rivera, former coordinator of the MST in Ceará and currently MST coordinator in Rio Grande do Norte, 1 October 2000; and with Zildethe Rodriguez Vera, FETRAECE, op.cit..

\textsuperscript{47} According to Sigaud (2000: 89), Pernambuco was one of the last states where the MST established a presence, precisely due to the strength and activism of the union movement; the first MST-led land occupation here was carried out in 1992, jointly with a base-level union (Ibid.: 78-9). Until then, almost all the land conflicts and assentamentos which were organized were supported either by FETAPE and/or the CPT. Today the MST and FETAPE are the dominant forces in the struggle for agrarian reform. In contrast, in Paraíba, the leading organization in support of agrarian reform efforts until recently has been the CPT; the MST presence dates from the early 1990s, and only after a CUT-oriented chapa took over FETRAECE in 1992, did the union begin to get actively involved in agrarian reform efforts; today these two organizations vie for leadership of these efforts. In Rio Grande do Norte, the MST presence also dates from the late 1980s, but its presence is not as strong as in Ceará. Moreover, union efforts on behalf of the agrarian reform also appear weaker, with INCRA still dominating over the assentamentos in a panorama similar to that which characterized Ceará until the mid-1990s. Interviews with Gema Galvani, researcher at UFC, 26 September 2000; Fatima Rivera, former coordinator of the MST in Ceará and currently MST coordinator in Rio Grande do Norte, 1 October 2000; and with Zildethe Rodriguez Vera, FETRAECE, op.cit..

\textsuperscript{48} Interviews with Vanete Almeida, op. cit.; Inez Bassanez, op. cit.; Maria de Soledad de Leite, founding member of MMT-Brejo, 25 September 2000, João Pessoa; and Margarida Pinheiro, CETRA and advisor to MMTR-NE, 27 September 2000, Fortaleza. Besides in Pernambuco and Paraíba, the MMTRs which have most strongly championed women’s land rights in the Northeast are those in Piauí and Maranhão; interview with Silvia Camurça and Ana Paola Portello, op. cit..
incorporated into the discourse of the CPT, 49 activists in Paraiba dated this from the first CUT state-level Congress in 1985. The young rural women activists interviewed considered it to be CPT policy, at least in this state, to support the titling of single women as well as the joint titling of land to couples.50 In terms of state-level differences, the CPT is only active in one region of Rio Grande do Norte (Mossorô), and does not appear to be very strong in Ceará in comparison with Paraiba or Pernambuco.51 In the words of Vanete Almeida (since its founding, one of the leading forces behind the MMTR-NE) “as mulheres que participam em organizações de qualquer tipo estaõ mais preparadas para demandar terra,”52 supporting our hypothesis regarding the differences between these four Northeastern states.

In explaining the differences between the high rate of participation of women in the agrarian reform in the Northeast and their low rate of participation in the South, female leaders of the rural social movements have quite different views of the factors which might explain this regional-level variation. In the South, interviewees stressed the difference in family structure between the two regions and the greater poverty of the Northeast. The high share of female beneficiaries in that region was viewed as a result of the break-down (or lack of existence of historically) of a culture of family farming, high rates of male migration, and the attendant high rates of female headship. In their view, the struggle for “sobrevivencia” in the Northeast has always been “extrema” with women having to play a greater role in household reproduction than in the South. But, as a result, they also view women in the Northeast as having more autonomy and self-esteem, factors they suggest may explain why women have been able and willing to demand land rights.53

49 An objective of the Regional Nordeste of the CPT is: “abordar a luta na terra e pela terra a partir da ótica feminina e considerar seu jeito próprio de se relacionar na sociedade” (CPT 1997: 258). This publication, nonetheless, while providing a brief overview of CPT activities related to the organization of rural women in a number of states, does not specifically mention women’s land rights.

50 Group interview of 26 September 2000 with CPT activists attending a monthly training session at the CPT headquarters, João Pessoa. In their training they are encouraged to support the promotion of women to leadership positions on the assentamentos. They have been most successful in the sertão, where women are now president of three out of the eight assentamentos which they accompany.

51 Interview with Margarida Pinheiro, CETRA, op. cit.

52 Interview of 20 September 2000, op. cit.

53 Group interview with Loiva Rubenitch, Ivens Guarani, Adriana Maria Mesadri and Arivone Escarbossa, MMTR-RS activists, 10 November 2000, Passo Fundo, RS; interview with Nina Tonin, 8 November 2000, Porto Alegre; and group interview with Sonilda Silva Pereira, assessora of FETAG-RS, Elizethe Hientz and Dirizinha Vier, FETAG municipal leaders, 8 November 2000, Porto Alegre.
In contrast, women in the South portray their own region-- a region of family farming resulting from the late-nineteenth century immigration of German and Italian families-- as “bem machista.” The conservative family, wherein marriage women are a total dependent of their husbands, has been supported by patrilineal inheritance practices where “a terra é do homem.” In this context, it is almost inconceivable that rural women might have or need independent land rights or aspire to become farmers on their own.\footnote{54}

In contrast, in explaining the higher share of female beneficiaries in the Northeast, interviewees there placed greater weight on the positive role of the rural unions in encouraging women’s growing awareness of their rights, including land rights. With great pride, they invoke the names of Elizabeth Texeira and Margarida Alves, Northeastern peasant leaders who have become national icons in the struggle for land, as well as that of union leader, Maria Penha Nascimento.\footnote{55} Although only Penha struggled specifically for women’s land rights, in popular discourse among organized rural women in this region, all three have come to symbolize the participation of women in the struggle for land as well as for their empowerment and citizenship.

Among other factors differentiating the Northeast and the South is that the rural unions have played a much greater role in the struggle for agrarian reform in the Northeast than in the South. Also, the social composition of the rural union movement is different, this being much more proletarian in the Northeast as compared to the South, where small property owners have tended to predominate.\footnote{56} Thus, as argued earlier, while the unionization of rural women began at about the same time in the Northeast and South, in the South this movement was largely concentrated among farms wives and daughters in contrast to the Northeast, where landless women and temporary and permanent wage workers are a much more visible and active component (Carneiro

\footnote{54} Ibid.

\footnote{55} All three are from Paraíba, but from different periods. Elizabeth Texeira assumed a leadership role in the Ligas Agrarias of the 1950s and early 1960s after her husband was assasinated. Margarida Alves also replaced her husband in the leadership of the union movement in the late 1970s when he became ill; she was assasinated by landlord henchmen in 1983, in a case which became nationally famous. See Carneiro (1994). Penha rose through the ranks to become president of Margarida’s municipal union after her death and was a founder of the MMTR-Brejo as well as the MMTR-NE and AMNTR.

\footnote{56} The main data supporting this proposition comes from the “Projeto CUT-CONTAG de pesquisa e formação sindical.” In the pamphlets summarizing the main conclusions by region estimates are given of the social composition of the union membership. In the Northeast, 33.6 percent of the membership consists of wage workers; 15.2 percent of small property holders; 14.8 percent of family farmers under other forms of tenancy; 35.8 percent of retirees; and 0.5 percent of agrarian reform beneficiaries or acampados. The comparable national figures are 29 percent wage workers; 19.9 percent small property holders; 13.2 percent other family farmers; 37.3 percent retirees; and 0.6 percent agrarian reform beneficiaries (CONTAG, CUT 1999: 32).
1994: 16-17). The same social make-up characterizes the MMTRs in the South, with its membership overwhelmingly constituted by women from farming families. While both the union movement and the MMTRs in the South support agrarian reform, this has not been their primary banner, with their main concern being the conditions of family farming. In addition, the common focus of the women’s commissions within the union movement as well as of the MMTRs has been the recognition of peasant women as rural workers and the benefits associated with it, such as paid maternal leave and retirement benefits.

Since the early 1980s, the organization of the landless in the South has been the domain of the MST which has also been the uncontested leader in agrarian reform efforts (Navarro, Morães and Menezes 1999). Thus in the South, more than in any other region, the gender composition of agrarian reform beneficiaries up to 1996 reflects the policies and orientation of the MST. As argued in the previous section, among the rural social movements, the MST was the slowest to incorporate a gender perspective and where women’s land rights have been most muted.

In making the argument that what might explain the different outcomes for women as direct beneficiaries of the agrarian reform is the role of the rural social movements, the exception is provided by Rio de Janeiro. In this state, which has the highest share of female beneficiaries of all states, the rural social movements have been relatively weak until recently. The MST only

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57 The only quantitative data available is from a CONTAG survey of the early 1990s of 928 women in 19 states; however, social composition is not broken down by region. Overall, 66.6 percent were smallholders, 12 percent were permanent and 10.1 percent temporary wage workers, and 5.7 percent were smallholders who also worked for a wage (Siqueira, Bandeira and Amin 1995: 245-46).

58 Interviews with Sonilda Silva Pereira, FETAG-RS, op. cit. and Salete Escher, coordinator of the Comissão Estadual da Mulher Trabalhadora Rural, CUT-Paraná, 14 November 2000, Curitiba.

59 Ibid., and interview with Loiva Rubenitch, op. cit, who noted that the MMTRs in the South encourage landless women to join the MST. The MST was also an actor in the founding of the MMTR-RS in 1989 and they maintain close relationships. In contrast, in Paraná the autonomous rural women’s movement, currently re-organized as the Organização das Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais de Paraná (OMTR) is closely linked to NGOs and the church, rather than the MST, and seems even more distant from agrarian reform efforts than the MMTR in Rio Grande do Sul. Interviews with Isabel Greem, MST-PR, op. cit. and Herminia Schuartz, OMTR, 13 November 2000. On the family farming composition of the MMA in Santa Catarina see Paulilo (2000); on the origins of the MMTR-RS and its demands see Brumer (1990; 1993; and 2000).

60 Interviews with Leonilde Servolo de Medeiros, researcher at CPDA/UFRRJ, 6 April 2000, Rio de Janeiro; and Maria Emilia Pacheco, researcher at FASE, 27 August 2000, Rio de Janeiro.
became active here after 1993; moreover, according to the coordinator of the MST in this state, “Para o MST é novo promover a mulher. O 18% no é resultado deles.”\textsuperscript{61} And FETAG-RJ has not been a protagonist in the agrarian reform until very recently. While CPT activists played an influential role in some of the land occupations of the early 1980s, in general, the state (both federal and state-level) has been considered the “interlocutor privilegiado” with respect to the agrarian reform (Medeiros, et. al., 1999: 135). This is also one of the states where the rural women’s movement is weakest. The MMTR does not exist at all and while FETAG-RJ has a Women’s Commission, it too is relatively weak, partly due to the fact that women’s participation in the municipal-level syndicates is still incipient.\textsuperscript{62}

The large share of female beneficiaries in Rio de Janeiro is perhaps best explained by the high degree of urbanization of this state, with only 4.75 percent of the population classified as rural in the 1991 Population Census (Medeiros, et. al. 1999: 123); the large concentration of assentamentos in the Greater Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area (Ibid.: 146); and the urban backgrounds of many of the agrarian reform beneficiaries. Mario Giuliani and Elisa de Castro (1996: 145) characterize the majority of assentados as having passed through a rural/urban/rural trajectory, while a not insignificant number have purely urban backgrounds, with no previous agricultural experience. One of the main consequences of this trajectory and of urban proximity is that the assentamentos are characterized by a high degree of pluriatividade, often facilitated by a gender division of labor.

In some of the assentamentos in this state which were the result of land occupations, such as the Mutirão Sol da Manhã (Baixada Fluminense), women were very active in the actual land takeover, in the acampamento, and in the current assentamento. Paola Cappellin and Elisa de Castro (1997: 124) report that some of the married women participated in the land struggle without the consent of their husbands, who only joined them once the assentamento was legalized. Moreover, the wives were often the “cadastradas” since their husbands continued to work in the urban areas and they often managed agricultural production on the assentamento plot or at least shared the tasks of plot cultivation and decision making with their spouses. They attribute the latter to urban influences, and contrast women’s participation in this assentamento with that of women in the assentamento of São José da Boa Morte (municipality of Cachoeiras de Macacú) where the majority of members have rural backgrounds and few women are either active in agricultural production or are direct beneficiaries of the reform (Ibid. 128-129; Castro 1998: 234).

\textsuperscript{61} Interview with Marina dos Santos, 28 August 2000, Rio de Janeiro. The MST was active in Rio de Janeiro in the mid 1980's but left the state in 1988 (Giuliani and Castro 1996: 145).

\textsuperscript{62} Interview with Judith Oliveira de Santos, coordenadora da Comissão das Mulheres, and Paôlo Cesar, President, FETAG-RJ, 30 October 2000, Niteroi, RJ.
According to the Superintendente of INCRA-RJ, it is INCRA policy to title a married woman if she’s the agriculturalist and her husband is engaged in urban activities, but this policy is relatively new (of the 1990s), reflecting the constitutional provisions that made it possible for women to be agrarian reform beneficiaries. Moreover, wives are titled if their husbands are too old to be beneficiaries or are aposentados. Nonetheless, on occasion, even if the woman has been the one that has struggled for the land, the husband returns to claim land rights and is cadastrado “si elas não reclamam.”

Interviewees also considered gender relations to be more advanced in Rio de Janeiro than in other regions, since it is such an urbanized state with a historically strong feminist and women’s movement. Compared with other regions, “a cultura e mais aberta,” with few restrictions on the mobility of either married or single women, explaining why married women would join land occupations on their own and claim land rights in their own name.

According to the 1996 Agrarian Reform Census, the majority of the female beneficiaries (53 percent) in Rio de Janeiro were female household heads, with one-third of these being widows. This relatively large share of female household heads suggests that they consider their potential income generating opportunities to be greater in agriculture than in the urban service sector. The fact that female household heads have left urban areas to seek land in the assentamentos, as well as the gender division of labor between urban and rural activities among married couples (Castro 1998: 230), suggests that in urban areas the opportunity cost of male labor is higher than for female labor, providing another explanation for the relatively high share of female beneficiaries in this, the most urbanized state of Brazil.

Up to now I have focused on the development of rural social movements and their incorporation of gender issues only up through the mid-1990s, in an attempt to explain the regional and state-level variation in the share of female agrarian reform beneficiaries captured by the 1996 census. Much has changed since then, with all of the rural social movements giving greater attention to women’s land rights, as developed in the next section.

**RECENT CHANGES**

The pace of the Brazilian agrarian reform stepped up in the mid-1990s, largely as result of the actions of the landless movement. In mid-1999 there were 3,958 assentamentos nationally,
with 475,801 beneficiary families holding almost 23 million hectares of land.\textsuperscript{66} Compared with the 1996 First Agrarian Reform Census figures, the number of assentamentos had increased by 2,533 and beneficiary families by 316,023. The majority of the assentamentos resulted from land take-overs led by the MST, but in this period, many of the union federations affiliated with CONTAG also engaged in land occupations, as did the CPT in the Northeast.\textsuperscript{67}

Preliminary data for eight states suggests that the increased pace of the agrarian reform has been accompanied by an increase in the share of women beneficiaries. As Table 6 shows, between 1996-2000 the number of agrarian reform beneficiaries more than doubled in five states while substantial increases were reported in the other three. The share of female beneficiaries increased significantly in Rio de Janeiro and substantially in Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, and Santa Catarina (states which had been at the low end of the spectrum in 1996) and Paraíba. The share of women remained about the same in Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Sul, and actually decreased in Paraná. Before explaining these state-level results, it is relevant to consider first the changes which have taken place in the gender discourse of the MST.

Recall that within the MST it was only in 1996, when the Colectivo Nacional da Mulher was constituted, that women’s land rights were addressed for the first time. In 1999 this forum was reconstituted as the Colectivo Nacional de Gênero, with an equal number of men and women participating on it, and the plan was for similar structures to be created at the state and sub-regional levels. According to one of its members, the mandate of the Colectivo Nacional da Mulher within the MST had never been very clear and what had become apparent was the need for a “revolução cultural” in the relations between men and women: “Tém que ser problema de ambos, mulher e homem en todas suas dimenções.”\textsuperscript{68}

Several factors explain the greater opening to gender issues by the MST at this time. For one, there was growing recognition within the leadership of the tendency for women to withdraw from

\textsuperscript{66}http://www.mst.org.br/bibliotec/assentam/assent4.html (downloaded 18 November 2000) which, in turn, is drawn from: DATALUTA, Banco de Dados da Luta pela Terra, UNESP/MST citing the INCRA/MST/ITESP/CPT data base, as of June 1999. It is not clear whether this figure includes the state-level agrarian reform projects. The latter were excluded from the First Agrarian Reform Census.

\textsuperscript{67} Between 1996 and 1999 the MST led at least 603 occupations with a reported 129,620 families participating. The number of acampamentos increased from 101 in 1995, to 489 in 1999 with 71,581 resident families. Calculated on the basis of data provided to the author by the MST National Office, São Paulo, 30 June 1998; updated on the basis of http://www.mst.org.br/bibliotec/ocupacao/ocupacao.htm; http://www.mst.org.br/bibliotec/ocupacao/ocupacao99.htm; and http://www.mst.org.br/bibliotec/acampam/acampot.htm (all downloaded 18 November 2000).

\textsuperscript{68} Interview with Marina dos Santos, MST-RJ, op. cit..
active participation once the assentamentos were constituted. The exclusion of most women from land rights has meant their exclusion in practice from participation in the associações and cooperatives that make the crucial decisions governing production plans, the obtention of credit, infrastructure and social investments, etc., on the assentamentos. As explained by one MST leader:

“Nós temos avaliação de que a mulher não ter o cadastro no seu nome é um grande problema...porque ela não é dona da propiedade, então quando vem a assistência técnica, o que acontece? O técnico chega e chama ‘Olha, os propietários, os parceleiros vem para reunião.’ Então quem é o parceleiro oficialmente? É o marido. Só ele vai para reunião da assistência técnica. Só ele vai para discutir os recursos...E ai vai excluindo a mulher em todos os momentos...”

It is increasingly recognized that this exclusion is not only prejudicial to women’s personal development, but also to the well-being of the assentamento and of the movement. In some cases the non-participation of women has been associated with a general apathy within the assentamento for collective endeavors, in turn, related to the general lack of participatory structures. In other cases it became apparent that the exclusion of women from the cadastro has generated practical problems such as when, due to the absence of the husband for whatever reason, women were unable to get credit for production.

Also, the problem of separations of couples has been gaining attention. The usual case is for the person with land rights, the husband, to remain on the land. The wife often has no choice but to leave with the children: “a mulher perde todos os direitos na separação, neste caso.” Sometimes she has to start the process all over, going to another acampamento in hopes of obtaining land even though she has already spent years in the struggle. While sometimes the man is willing to leave so his wife and children can remain in their home, this presents difficulties; since the land is in his name, officially, he cannot again be an agrarian reform beneficiary.

“Nos temos muitos casos de mulheres que na hora da separação, então, elas não tem coragem de separar, se tem problema elas brigam, apanham, sofrem...o marido agride, mas elas não tem condição de se separar, porque elas não tem economicamente como se manter. Só as muito corajosas tomam esta decisão ou então que tem apoio da comunidade, a comunidade se posiciona e diz ‘não, quem fica aqui é ela.’ Ou então ele diz ‘não, tudo bem, ela lutou também, ela fica, ela vai ficar com as crianças mesmo então ela

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69 This trend has been reported in a number of studies, such as Miele and Guimarães (1998) and Rua and Abramovay (2000).

70 Interview with Isabel Greem, MST-PR, op. cit.

71 Group interview by the author and Emma Siliprandi with women militants in the MST Regional Sarandi, 9 November 2000, Pontão, RS. Also see Rua and Abramovay (2000: 201-3).
The problem of separations is being discussed within the Coletivo de Gênero and in the encontros de casais which have been promoted in certain states to discuss gender issues within the leadership.

One of the first activities of the Coletivo de Gênero was the publication of a training pamphlet entitled *Mulher Sem Terra* (MST 2000), consisting of eight topics for sessions designed to reflect on gender relations. One of the topics is “As Mulheres e a Reforma Agraria” and includes the following points:

1. Que as mulheres, junto com os homens e jovens devem participar dos núcleos de bases, das coordenações dos assentamentos, das cooperativas, do partido, do sindicato...que na coordenação dos acampamentos e assentamentos seja 50% de homens e 50% de mulheres (ou seja, deve ter um coordenador e uma coordenadora);
2. Que no trabalho da produção...as mulheres participem não só do trabalho, mas que se envolvam no planejamento, na execução, na administração, na distribuição dos resultados e na hora em que o técnico vem fazer explicação ou dar um curso, também as mulheres estejam ai para aprender;
3. Que os cursos de formação não sejam coisa só para homens. As mulheres devem buscar participar, pois só dirige quem sabe;
4. Que na luta pela terra, ocupação, acampamento, mobilizações, participa toda a família, portanto, a conquista da terra é uma conquista da família. Nada mais justo que quando o INCRA vem fazer o cadastro, este seja feito no nome dos dois... É muito importante que os projetos de financiamento, todos sejam assinado pela mulher e pelo homem” (Ibid.: 57-58).

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72 Interview with Isabel Greem, MST-PR, op. cit.

73 This section of the pamphlet is drawn from the "Linhas Políticas do MST sobre a Participação das Mulheres" which was approved by the Coordenação Nacional do MST in January 1999; e-mail to the author from Gema Galgani, gender advisor to the MST-Ceará, 8 May 2001.

74 Other points in this section of the pamphlet stress the importance of fathers being involved in the education of their children; the need for cirandas infantis at all meetings of the MST so that women can participate; the need to create coletivos de mulheres in the assentamentos and acampamentos where women can get together to better prepare themselves for participating in decision-making at all levels; and the importance of creating spaces where men and women can come together to discuss gender issues (MST 2000: 58).
Paragraph 4, above, implies that the joint adjudication of land to couples is now part of the MST’s linhas políticas and was so confirmed by women in the MST leadership who consider it part of the “pauta de revindicações.” Nonetheless, this demand still does not form part of the MST’s public discourse. This was evident at the March 2000 mobilization of rural women workers jointly coordinated by the ANMTR and the MST. From March 13-17, some 3,000 rural women from twenty-four states camped out in Brasilia, in what was termed “o primeiro acampamento das mulheres rurais” under the slogan “Mulheres gerando vida, construindo um novo Brasil.” Among the main objectives was to strengthen the struggle for rural women’s right to previdencia and health; to denounce the neoliberal government project in favor of a Projeto Popular; and to reivindicar the agrarian reform, subsidized credit for small producers, agricultural insurance, and the pardon of agricultural debts. Among the demands there was nothing concerning women’s land rights.

This ambiguity was also apparent at the MST’s Fourth National Congress in Brasilia in August 2000. Among the twelve linhas políticas reaffirmed at the congress was “Resgatar e implementar em nossas linhas políticas e em todas atividades do MST e na sociedade, a questão de gênero.” Yet the MST remained strangely silent about women’s land rights. Nonetheless, one of the important recent changes is that women now represent nine out of the 21 members of the MST’s Direção Nacional.

What became clear in my interviews is that the internalization of gender concerns is taking place within the MST at different paces in different states. In certain states there is a notable change in the gender discourse taking place at the base, sometimes associated with an increase in the number of women in leadership positions on the assentamentos or within the MST’s regional or state leadership. It is not uncommon to hear the observation that “women participate more in assentamentos where there is a women leader;” or that “women are more committed” including that “some of the best assentamentos have women leaders.” This evolving process may account, in part, for the increase in the share of female agrarian reform beneficiaries in states such as Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, and Santa Catarina. I do not think it is coincidental that women are the coordinators of the MST in these states; moreover, in Ceará, women now constitute the majority of the MST state leadership.

75 Interview with Fatima Rivera, MST-RN, op. cit.


78 Interview with Vilanisi Oliveira da Silva, MST Coordinator in Ceará, 27 September 2000, Fortaleza.
Ceará and Rio Grande do Sul appear to be among the leaders in implementing some of the new policies contained in the 1999 document cited above. In Rio Grande do Sul, since 1997 the state leadership has sought to re-organize its bases within the assentamentos, restructuring these as nucleos de familia, each with 10 to 15 families and a male and female coordinator. Moreover, the necessity of joint titling to couples and that credit petitions be made jointly by husband and wife has been thoroughly discussed at all levels and has become a demand of the MST in discussions with INCRA and the state of Rio Grande do Sul’s agrarian reform program.

In Ceará efforts thus far have focused on gender training to couples in the MST leadership at the state and regional level. The plan is to extend these sessions to the assentamentos before beginning the process of “nucleização” (ie., organizing by groups of 15-20 families with a man and woman as co-coordinators). Discussions have taken place on some of the assentamentos on the importance of joint titling to couples. Discussions with INCRA have focused on the necessity of including female household heads as well as youth in the cadastros, and with respect to the former, the MST state coordinator considers that there has been some progress, perhaps captures by the data in Table 6.

Most of the land occupations in Rio de Janeiro since 1995 have taken place in the sugar cane-belt of this state, with the great majority of these led by the MST (Medeiros, et. al. 1999: 143). Most of the beneficiaries have been former workers in this sector. The substantial increase in the

79 The hours of meetings on the assentamentos have been changed so that these are compatible with women’s domestic responsibilities and it is now increasingly common for cirandas or creches to be provided for child care in MST meetings at all levels. It is also notable that in this state of the five women (out of 21) elected to the Direção Estadual two were the top vote recipients in the 2000 MST state elections. Group interview by the author and Emma Siliprandi with women militants in the MST Regional Sarandi, op. cit.

80 Interviews with Nina Tonin, op. cit.; Maria Lourdes Alvarez da Rosa, Superintendente Substituta, INCRA-RS, 6 November 2000; and Marcelo Picin, Departamento de Desarollo Rural e Reforma Agrária, Secretaria de Agricultura e Abastecimento, Rio Grande do Sul, 6 November 2000, Porto Alegre. According to Elenice Pastore, Coordinadora Estadual da Mulher-RS, this state has now adopted mandatory joint titling to couples in land distributed through the state-level agrarian reform program. Interview of 8 November 2000, Porto Alegre.

81 Interviews on the assentamento José Lourenço (Chorarinho, CE), 30 September 2000.

82 Interview with Vilanisi Oliveira da Silva, op. cit. According to her, INCRA has resisted even discussing the possibility of joint titling to couples up until now. This may change soon, since Ceará and Paraná have been chosen as the case studies for an INCRA-FAO project, “O Novo Olhar do INCRA para as Mulheres Rurais,” which includes implementing joint titling to couples among its objectives.
share of women beneficiaries in Rio de Janeiro between 1996 and 2000 is probably related to the large number of women among the unemployed cane boiás-frias, the fact that recent land occupations have been concentrated in this sector, and that the MST-RJ is giving greater attention to the incorporation as women as reform beneficiaries.\(^\text{83}\)

What is curious is that in both Paraíba and Pernambuco women have also traditionally been active participants in the sugar cane harvests and the majority of land occupations and expropriations in recent years have also been concentrated in the sugar cane region, but whereas in Paraíba (as in Rio de Janeiro) this process has been accompanied by an increase in the share of female reform beneficiaries, in Pernambuco their share has remained the same as in 1996. Their absolute numbers, of course, have grown in tandem with those of male beneficiaries.

In Paraná, which has witnessed the most spectacular increase in the number of agrarian reform beneficiaries of all states in this recent period, the share of women has actually fallen, partly reflecting the lack of attention to gender issues by the MST-Paraná until very recently. Only in October 2000 did the state directorate (made up by two women out of 18) take up the discussion of gender issues and the state coletivo de gênero has yet to be created. Besides the lack of attention by the MST to women’s land rights, the data also reflect the very conservative nature of this state, characterized by continued landlord dominance and a much weaker civil society and social movements as compared with other southern states.\(^\text{84}\)

Turning to CONTAG, not until 1997 (three years after it joined the CUT and the Rural Women’s Commission of the CUT was disbanded nationally) did it organize a national commission on women. By then, there were on the order of two million rural women affiliated to rural unions (Abramovay and da Silva 2000: 355). That same year CONTAG held the Primeira Plenaria Nacional de Trabalhadoras Rurais, where the main focus of discussion was whether a 30 percent quota for women should be mandated in union elections, and securing rural women’s social security benefits. Nonetheless, a demand of the meeting with respect to the agrarian reform was “que seja feito o cadastro de todas as mulheres e filhos nas áreas de asentamento” (CONTAG 1997: 14). At its Seventh Congress in 1998 CONTAG adopted the 30 percent female quota and created the position of Coordenadora da Comissão Nacional das Mulheres as

\(^{83}\) Interview with Marina dos Santos, op. cit.

\(^{84}\) Interview with Isabel Greem, op. cit. The union movement is also quite different in this state than in Rio Grande do Sul, being practically equally divided between FETAEPE (with leaders from the period of collaboration with the military dictatorship) and the CUT. Both primarily compete for the allegiances of small farmers and have left the organization of the landless and the struggle for agrarian reform to the MST. The most dynamic work with rural women and on gender relations has been at the instigation of the Comissão Estadual da Mulher Trabalhadora Rural of the CUT. Interview with Salete Escher, op. cit.
part of its Executive Directory.  All told 47 specific actions relevant to rural women were approved, including the following: “#21 que o INCRA enquadra as mulheres como trabalhadoras rurais no cadastro de assentados e ITR;..#38 Exigir do INCRA a inscrição do casal e não somente do homem...” (CONTAG 1998: 124).

The year 2000 yielded some progress in terms of advancing women’s land rights. As part of the national coordination for the Marcha Mundial de Mulheres, CONTAG launched events in Brazil with the celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8th. More than 36,000 women were reported to have participated at the local level nationally and set the stage for the planned march on Brasilia, the Marcha das Margaridas, on August 10th (the anniversary of the assassination of northeastern union leader Margarida Alves). The main issues of this prolonged campaign were “valorização e fortalecimento da participação da mulher na reforma agrária e na agricultura familiar; garantia e ampliação de direitos trabalhistas e sociais e o combate a violência e impunidade no campo e a todas as formas de discriminação social e de gênero.” The slogan of the march was later shortened to “Contra a fome, a pobreza e a violência.” In the flyers and pamphlets distributed prior to the march, however, a recurring theme was “valorização da participação da mulher na Reforma Agrária,” but without land rights being made explicit.

In the “Pautas de Reivindicacões da Marcha das Margaridas,” prepared for the August 10th event by the coordinating committee, nonetheless, women’s land rights did figure explicitly. The

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85 At its 7th Congress, three women were elected to fill ten of the positions of the national Executive Directorate; at its 8th Congress in 2001, four women were elected to fill eleven positions. Interview with Maria das Graças Amorín and Maria Fatima da Silva of the CONTAG national directorate and Socorro Sousa, gender advisor, 10 August 2001, Brasilia.

86 The MMTR-NE’s “Pauta de Reivindicacoes” in 1998 with INCRA were similar to those adopted by CONTAG (MMTR-NE 1998: Appendix). In contrast, the AIMTR-Sul (which tends to dominate the ANMTR) generally follows the political line of the MST.

87 The Marcha Mundial das Mulheres 2000 resulted from a proposal from the women’s movement in Quebec, Canada, to organize women world-wide between March 8th and October 17th (International Day in the Struggle against Poverty), culminating with a delegation presenting its demands before the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.


89 See the pamphlet distributed by CONTAG, Boletim Informativo (n.d.) “Marcha Das Margaridas: Contra a fome, a pobreza e a violencia - dia 10 de Agosto.”

90 The Coordinating Committee for the march, besides CONTAG and its affiliated state federations and municipal-level unions, included the CUT, MMTR-NE, Movimento Nacional de
first among nine major categories of demands was for a national documentação campaign aimed at rural women to be supported by the federal government in cooperation with state and municipal governments. A second, was access by rural women workers “as políticas publicas da Reforma Agrária,” specifically:

i) “Editar norma para que a documentação do assentamento ou parcela seja expedida em nome do casal e no nome da mulher quando esta for solteira;” and


With an estimated 15,000-20,000 rural women converging on Brasilia, the coordinating committee was received by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and INCRA President Orlando Muniz on August 9th and they presented their list of 81 specific demands. According to press reports, “Segundo Muniz, o instituto vai modificar os títulos de propriedades rurais para que saiam em nome dos casais e não apenas no do homem, corrigindo a distorção reclamada pelas trabalhadoras...O Incra vai estudar as outras reivindicações.” While the march was amply covered in the press, the demand for women’s land rights received less attention. But the Margaridas caught the attention of the government with this “maior manifestação de mulheres nesse país,” as it was called by its organizers, and a detailed schedule of follow-up meetings were set up between the coordinating committee and the relevant federal ministries.

In subsequent months, the heightened interest of rural women in the land rights issue was palpable. In my interviews between September and November 2000 it was evident that the demand for joint titling to couples had been internalized by leaders not only of the CONTAG-affiliated state federations, but also of the MMTRs, MST, and the CPT. Moreover, rural women in acampamentos and assentamentos alike voiced the expectation that women’s names would now be included along with the men’s in the agrarian reform cadastro. There was also the expectation that it would now be easier for female household heads in the acampamentos to have their claims

Quebradeiras de Coco, Conselho Nacional de Seringueiros, Movimento de Luta pela Terra, União Brasileira de Mulheres and the NGOs Sempre Viva Organização Feminista (SOF), Associação Agroecológica Tijupa, FASE, and ESPLAR. Notably absent was the MST as well as the ANMTR.


92 See, for example, O Globo, 11 August 2000: 10; Jornal do Brasil 11 August 2000: 7. What drew the attention of the press was that the Marcha das Margaridas overlapped with the IV National Congress of the MST in Brasilia and that the two groups did not join forces to press any of their common demands (such as for a deepening of the agrarian reform), reflecting the strained relations between the MST and CONTAG at this time.
INCRA Superintendentes, nonetheless, were confused about what the demand for joint titling meant in practice. Some claimed that joint adjudication (having both names on the cadastro) was not necessary since under Brasil’s Civil Code in case of separation or divorce married couples and partners in consensual unions have equal rights, and all common property acquired during the union should be divided in equal shares. Moreover, they argued that in the definitive title issued for land parcels on the assentamentos, both names must always appear. There was also concern that including the names of both partners in the cadastro would complicate record keeping of how many families were actually being benefitted. A few Superintendentes, nonetheless, favored the measure but for quite different reasons. In the state of Paraná he thought it was a positive measure since it would “fortalecer a familia.” Only that of Pernambuco thought it was a positive measure because it would enhance the status of women in the assentamentos, whose role he considered key to the success of the agrarian reform.

The expedition of Resolution No. 6 of 22 February 2001 by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável (CNDRS) of the Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário (MDA) was the outcome of the negotiating process between the coordinating committee of the Marcha das Margaridas and the inter-ministerial group charged with following up on their demands. According to the ministry, this resolution provides for a “perspectiva de gênero em todos os instrumentos administrativos do MDA,” and there are to be changes in “nas normas de

93 Interviews of 19 September 2000 on the joint MST-CPT acampamento in the city of Recife to protest the lack of expropriations by INCRA-PE during 2000. Two of the women whom I interviewed (affiliated with the CPT) had participated in the March in Brasilia and reiterated how women’s land rights were central to their discussions and demands.

94 While this might be the letter of the law, this argument misses the point about the difficulty women have in securing half of the joint assets, particularly, when it consists of land. Moreover, since land on most assentamentos has not been officially titled, it is not legally part of the couple’s joint patrimony.

95 I examined these definitive titles in the INCRA office in Rio de Janeiro and they provide a space for the name of each spouse and require the signature of each on the back. The problem is that very few assentamentos have reached the stage of being ready for definitive titling or emancipação. This requires that the agreed-upon infrastructure be in place, among other factors. Also, the MST has resisted that assentamentos reach the stage of emancipação, since once liberated from INCRA’s tutelage, they may not be eligible for subsidized credit or technical assistance. Moreover, farmers may then be required to repay the government for the land and be subject to property taxation.

96 Interviews with José Carlos de Araújo Vieira, op. cit., and Geraldo Eugenio, Superintendente of INCRA-PB, 18 September 2000, Recife.
seleção para facilitar o acesso das mulheres aos benefícios da reforma agrária.  

Subsequently, the “Programa de Ações Afirmativas para Promoção de Igualdade de Oportunidades e de Tratamento entre Homens e Mulheres” was institutionalized within the Ministry. The new Affirmative Action office was charged with revamping all criteria and norms to facilitate rural women’s access to land and to titles, credit, training, technical assistance and social security benefits. This objective was made more concrete by another directive which established a target for 2001 of 30 percent female representation in the distribution of credits within PRONAF (Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar) and the Land Bank (Fundo do Terras e da Reforma Agrária) as well as in PRONAF training and extension programs. In addition, a goal of the ministry is to progressively attain 30 percent female representation in its administrative structure.

With respect to INCRA, one of the first accomplishments of the Affirmative Action office was to redesign almost all of the forms utilized in the agrarian reform beneficiary selection process so that the name of both spouses or partners appear on the first page of the form as co-applicants or beneficiaries. (Formerly, the names of wives and companions appeared on the second page, heading the list of the dependents of the head of household). In August 2001 I found that only one crucial form remained to be changed, the “Relação de Beneficiários,” which lists the beneficiaries on each assentamento. Following traditional practice, this listing still included only one person per household. During my visit to MDA/INCRA steps were put in motion to assure that the name of the couple appear in this crucial listing of beneficiaries.

While a number of gender-progressive measures have thus been adopted during 2001, it is worth noting that no specific mention has been made of female household heads. In order to end the discrimination to which these have traditionally been subject, other Latin American countries have found it necessary to employ “positive action” or “reverse discrimination,” making these an explicit priority in state programs involved in the redistribution of assets. This has usually been

97 The resolution does not explicitly establish joint adjudication and titling of land but rather, focuses on nondiscrimination. It does establish, however, that women are to be considered as rural workers or agriculturalists in the cadastro, rather than the traditional designation of housewives. See Diario Oficial da União, 5 March 2001, and www.desenvolvimentoagrario.gov.br/mulher/noticias, (accessed 10 march 2001).

98 MDA, Portaria No. 33, 8 March 2001 (photocopy).

99 MDA, Portaria No. 121, 22 May 2001 (photocopy).

100 MDA, Portaria No. 120, 22 May 2001 (photocopy).

101 Interview with Lenita Nonan, Assessora Especial do Ministro and Coordinator of the Affirmative Action Program, and staff, MDA/INCRA, 8 August 2001, Brasilia.
accomplished by assigning them more points in beneficiary selection criteria, justified on the grounds that this favored treatment is necessary to compensate for the discrimination to which they were previously subject (Deere and León 2001a: chpt. 6). Given the fact that the majority of female beneficiaries of Brazil’s agrarian reform up through 1996 were wives or partners, rather than female household heads, the lack of specific attention to female household heads remains a lacunae in its policies to end gender discrimination.

Nonetheless, Brazil is the pioneer among Latin American countries in assigning rural women a target quota of 30 percent in the credit being made available for the purchase of land. The Land Bank is the subject of intense controversy, seen by its critics as a means of undermining the Federal Government’s responsibility for agrarian reform. From a feminist perspective it is questionable whether a program that requires credit-worthiness as a pre-condition for participation and that expects farmers to be able to repay their mortgages on near commercial terms under neo-liberal policies is the best way to guarantee gender equity in the acquisition of land. But this topic awaits further research.

CONCLUSION

The achievement of formal equality of land rights between men and women attained in the 1988 constitutional reform was an important, but limited, advance for rural women. As I have shown, this measure was the result of the demands of organized rural women within the rural unions and the MMTRs and their alliance with the urban women’s movement and women in the state. The achievement of formal equality in land rights, nonetheless, did not lead to increases in the share of women beneficiaries in the agrarian reform. INCRA did modify its most explicitly discriminatory practice, the assignment of fewer points to women than men in the beneficiary selection process. Other criteria, however, continued to discriminate against female household heads. Moreover, although joint adjudication and titling was now a legal possibility, the fact that it was an option rather than mandatory meant that it was simply not implemented.

I have argued that the relatively low share of female agrarian reform beneficiaries in the mid-1990s also reflects the fact that attaining women’s effective land rights was not a top priority of any of the rural social movements. While women’s participation in rural unions continued to grow over this period, and women’s land rights were on the agenda at most national meetings and congresses, land rights were one issue among many. The priorities of the autonomous rural women’s movement were perhaps even more varied and diffuse than that of the unions. CONTAG, CUT and the MMTRs all gave greater attention to the pressing issue of the recognition of rural women’s profession in the context of attaining social security benefits for women, than to women’s land rights. This is understandable given the fact that this was the issue

that united all rural women, independent of their class position. But it also created a vacuum in terms of the effective championing of women’s land rights since, throughout this period, the main social movement determining the pace and content of the agrarian reform was the MST, and of all the movements, it had the most muted discourse on gender, one that essentially considered class and gender issues to be incompatible.

While the above factors explain why women have been a relatively low share of agrarian reform beneficiaries in Brazil compared with other Latin American countries, they do not explain the broad variation by state and region. To do so I have considered both quantitative and qualitative factors. The quantitative analysis revealed that the share of female reform beneficiaries by state was positively, but weakly correlated to the share of rural female household heads and negatively, but weakly correlated to the price of cultivated land. It was also shown that in most states female household heads on the assentamentos were under-represented when compared with their share within the rural population. The majority of female beneficiaries are wives and partners who have been ceded lands rights primarily because their male companion does not qualify as a reform beneficiary. In only exceptional cases has the attainment of land rights by women been the result of their individual struggle for land; significantly, this has taken place in states which, overall, show the highest share of female reform beneficiaries, Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro.

What stands out most in my comparison of the Northeast and the South are the differences in the composition of the rural social movements, with the unions and MMTRs in the Northeast being much more proletarian than in the South, and the fact that these have played a much greater role in the struggle for agrarian reform in the Northeast region. In contrast, in the South the MST was the undisputed leader of the landless and of the agrarian reform, with the unions and autonomous women’s movement much more focused on family agriculture. While the increased participation of rural women within the unions and the organization of the MMTRs occurred about the same time in the South and Northeast, the different composition of these movements in the two regions partly explains why women’s land rights became a much more important issue in the Northeast, paving the way for women’s greater incorporation as beneficiaries of the agrarian reform.

The available data suggest that with the expansion of the agrarian reform in the second half of the 1990s--a result associated with the territorial consolidation of the MST as a national organization as well as the radicalization of many of the unions on the agrarian reform issue--there has been an increase in the share of female beneficiaries in certain states. I suggest that this result is partly attributable to the gradual opening within the MST to gender concerns, itself a reflection of the slow, but incremental participation of women within the MST leadership at all levels and the pressing need to consolidate the assentamentos.

Recognition of the importance of women’s land rights generally takes place for two reasons, what we have called elsewhere the “productionist” and the “empowerment” arguments (Deere and León 1997; 2001a). The productionist argument refers to the recognition that women’s land
rights are associated with an increase in the well-being of women and their children as well as an enhancement of their productivity, and hence, the well-being of their community and society. The empowerment argument recognizes that women’s land rights are critical to enhancing their bargaining power within the household and community, to ending their subordination to men, and hence, to achieving real equality between men and women.

The opening of the MST to gender concerns at this point in time is related to implicit awareness of the productionist argument; that is, that the failure to recognize women’s land rights is prejudicial to the development and consolidation of the assentamentos and thus the movement. Nonetheless, there is recognition of some of the ways in which women’s lack of land rights reduces their bargaining power, such as in the case of domestic discord or violence. Equally important, it is recognized that joint adjudication and titling to couples is a precondition for women’s participation in assentamento assemblies, associations and cooperatives. The possibility for women to participate in such community structures is critical to women’s ability to defend and pursue their own practical and strategic gender interests. Increasing women’s bargaining power within the household and community are thus complementary and interactive measures which are necessary if gender relations are to be changed in pursuit of both gender and social equality.

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Table 1: Beneficiaries of the Agrarian Reform by Sex, State and Region, 1996 (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Homens</th>
<th>Mulheres</th>
<th>S.i.</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>NORTH</td>
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<tr>
<td>AC Acre</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Regional Average</td>
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<td><strong>12.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>Region</td>
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<td>Rio Grande do Norte</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Sergipe</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUTHEAST</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Espírito Santo</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Minas Gerais</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>São Paulo</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CENTER-WEST</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
<td>Goiás</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Mato Grosso</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Mato Grosso Sul</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUTH</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Paraná</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Rio Grande do Sul</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Santa Catarina</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: INCRA/CRUB/UnB, I Censo da Reforma Agrária, p. 26
Table 2: Year of Assentamento by Sex of the Beneficiary (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Before 1964</th>
<th>1964-84</th>
<th>1985-90</th>
<th>1991-96</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=121,186)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=17,692)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=138,878)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s calculations based on the 1 Censo da Reforma Agrária -1996.

Table 3: Correlations with the Share of Female Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of Female Household Heads</th>
<th>Female Agricultural EAP Participation Rate</th>
<th>Share of Female Ag. Temporary Workers</th>
<th>Rural Sex Ratio</th>
<th>Av. Land Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.303072</td>
<td>-0.20695</td>
<td>-0.03400</td>
<td>0.179667</td>
<td>-0.22840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conforms to Expectations:

Yes          No          No          No          Yes
Sources:

INCRA/CRUB/UNb, *1 Censo da Reforma Agrária* (1998: Table 1.7)
Brasil, *Censo Demográfico 1991 - Familias e Domicilios* (1996: Table 1.2)

### Table 4: Marital Status of the Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries by Sex, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensual Union</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub-total</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population Census</td>
<td>Agrarian Reform Census</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>sub-total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total      | 100.0            | 100.0                  |
|            | (n=18.048)       | (n=124,134)            |

Source: Author’s calculations based on the 1 Censo da Reforma Agrária -1996.

Table 5: Share of Rural Female Household Heads by State in the Population Census as compared with the Share of Female Household Heads who are Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:
Author’s calculations, *1 Censo da Reforma Agrária* - 1996.

Table 6: Changes in the Share of Female Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries, 1996 and 2000

---

**Northeast**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceará</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>10.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n= 9.191)</td>
<td>(n=17.753)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraíba</td>
<td>16.91</td>
<td>17.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pernambuco</td>
<td>16.47</td>
<td>16.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grande do Norte</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>10.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southeast</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>22.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grande do Sul</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>9.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Catarina</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>9.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraná</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Sources:
1996 INCRA/CRUB/UNb, *Censo da Reforma Agrária*, Table 1.7.
2000 Author’s interviews with INCRA Superintendências, data entries in the SIPRA information system as of September.