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Gendered frontiers of land control: indigenous territory, women and contests over land in Ecuador

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Agricultural and rural land has become the site of considerable policy, governmental and scholarly concern worldwide because of violence and dispossession, food insecurity and contests over private property regimes. Such issues are highly gendered in territories with majorities of indigenous populations where overlapping legal regimes (statutory, multicultural, customary) and histories of dispossession have created complex spatialities and access patterns. States' formalization of indigenous rights, neoliberal restructuring and land appropriation are the backdrop to Ecuadorian women's struggles to access, retain and pass on land. Despite a burgeoning literature on Latin American indigenous territories, women are often invisible. Using collaborative research among two indigenous nationalities, the article analyses the political–economic, legal and *de facto* regimes shaping women's claims to land and indigenous territory. Focusing on Kichwa women in the rural Andes and Tsáchila women in a tropical export-oriented agricultural frontier area, the article examines the criteria and exclusionary practices that operate at multiple scales to shape women's (in)security in tenure. Women's struggles over claims to land and territory are also discussed. The article argues that Latin America's fraught land politics requires a gendered account of indigenous land–territoriality to unpack the cultural bias of western feminist accounts of multiculturalism and to document the racialized gender bias across socio-institutional relations.

Keywords: gender; neoliberalism; collective title; Ecuador; land grabs; multiculturalism

New frontiers of land control are being actively created, through struggles involving varied actors, contexts, and dynamics ... They are sites where authorities, sovereignties, and hegemonies of the recent past have been or are currently being challenged by new enclosures, territorializations, and property regimes. (Peluso and Lund 2011, 668)

Introduction

Agricultural and rural land comprises an arena of considerable policy, governmental and scholarly enquiry worldwide, because of concerns over violence and dispossession, food security, and neoliberal moves to determine property regimes. The contested relations between states, corporate actors and social movements have increasingly gained attention, focused on how landed property, market economies and diverse economic interests result in land grabbing, dispossession and material and representational enclosure (Deere and León 2001a, 2001b; Wolford 2010; Borras et al. 2011; Hall, Hirsch, and Murray Li 2011; Peluso and Lund 2011). While highlighting the high stakes involved, this literature tends to analyse land as an economic resource and source of political–economic contention,

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defined within the market, legislation and judicial regimes. By contrast, literature on Latin American indigenous and peasant claims stresses racialized hierarchies and post-colonial histories of dispossession, as these are reworked in resisting market reforms, land grabs, and struggles over multiculturalism (Wainwright 2008; Gustafson 2009; Smith et al. 2009; Kelly et al. 2010; Fabricant 2012).

As yet, however, the gendered nature of such land politics has remained a secondary concern especially in Latin America, although Deere and León's work provides key insights into gender–land dynamics (Deere and León 2001a, 2001b; Deere and Contreras 2011). Women's position regarding landed property rights and market liberalization since the 1990s (Agarwal 2003; Razavi 2007) has been more extensively documented in Sub-Saharan Africa than elsewhere (Carney 1998; Watson, Adams, and Mutiso 1998; Gray and Kevane 1999), as have the interplays between customary procedures, multicultural and gender reforms, and markets (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Tripp 2004). Reflecting the scarcity of detailed substantive research (Jacobs 2009, 1677), little has been written about women in racial subaltern populations in Latin America; Mollett's (2010) account of women's struggles to register land in a protected area is a rare exception. With the rising political valance of land and territory, this article offers a critical substantive account of the experiences of indigenous women in Ecuador. As women's rights to land (including type, use and access route) depend on 'social positioning in customary and statutory law' (Gray and Kevane 1999, 18), the article uses a dual focus – on land as property and on territory as the spatial basis for constructing meanings of cultural–racial difference, what I call 'land–territory' – to analyse indigenous women's access. The article attempts a critical development geography account of gendered power relations behind indigenous land–territoriality.

Indigenous territoriality–land issues lie at the intersection of economic, political and sociocultural relations. Latin American states' decisions about land are made through agrarian development policy, driven by economic imperatives and historically and geographically specific understandings of the 'social use' of land, in which indigenous claims have generally been dismissed. Simultaneously, the political–administrative demarcation of territories – and recently, indigenous territories – raises questions about sovereignty, and the status of indigenous people as citizens. Territory carries weighty symbolic importance for ethnic politics which, as discussed below, is often articulated in highly gendered terms. For these interrelated reasons, land–territory comprises multifaceted problems for indigenous women. Indigenous women as citizens may have one claim on land, but their cultural-symbolic claim may be articulated differently, while an economic relation with land may be shaped by political–economic pressures.

This article highlights how gendered relations with land are configured through a combination of ongoing dispossession of racialized populations, through legally established differences in men's and women's status, and the grounded realities of women's political–economic (not merely sociosymbolic) position in ethnic communities. Through a comparative case study, the article tracks the processes that shape the criteria and practices through which women come to claim and secure access – and in some cases, legal title to – land–territory (cf. Paulson 2003). Such an account requires a dissection of private property arrangements secured under the market and capitalist agrarian reform, as well as forms of collective ownership awarded to ethnic groups. Law, development, political economies and culture represent overlapping, contested and highly gendered arenas within which women's ties to land–territory are defined, realized and undermined (Carney 2004). Regardless of the gendered discourses existing within indigenous populations (cf. Mollett 2010, 366), Ecuadorian indigenous women's situation regarding

land–territory results from the multiscalar intersection between national development discourses, market relations, elite notions of ethnic difference, differentiated gender labour inputs and bias towards male heads of households with complex post-colonial development positionalities. A gendered account of indigenous territoriality has to keep these dimensions in creative tension in order to explore the multifaceted gender politics around indigenous land–territoriality. Neither ethnic nor gender factors are primary, as gender intersects with class, race, location and other inequalities (also Radcliffe 2002). Ecuador's indigenous women increasingly articulate a set of demands that centre on both ethnicity *and* gender, rejecting a stark choice between collective and individual rights.

Comparing two indigenous groups (highland Andean Kichwa and tropical Tsáchila) reveals how these dynamics vary across space, reflecting histories of women's activism, ethno-cultural valuations of women's claims and the relationship between local and national political economies. The structure of the article is as follows: Section I briefly adumbrates indigenous concepts of and claims over territory. Section II outlines the major policy influences on the gendering of economic and political meanings of land–territory, highlighting neoliberalism and multiculturalism. Section III outlines Kichwa and Tsáchila women's experiences of land–territory, before discussing women's activism in Section IV. I argue that a gendered account of indigenous territoriality is required, which moderates a western feminist account of the deleterious impacts of multicultural land settlements, while documenting the gender bias found across the social and institutional relations that shape women's access to land.¹

I Gender and Indigenous concepts of land and territory

Generally, indigenous populations in the Americas value territory as an 'integrated resource that sustains the human community and provides autonomous space for the reproduction of present and future generations' (Griffiths 2004, 51). Land–territory is considered to be a communal possession of a distinctive people. Customary laws concerning landed territory are often considered to ensure its beneficial use for the specific group and prohibit alienation of part or whole. Unlike many Latin American countries' civil codes (namely, land ownership rights derive exclusively from property's social function, i.e. agricultural use), 'customary law sees exclusive rights of possession flowing from use, occupancy, practical and spiritual knowledge, and religious and spiritual ties to the land' (Griffiths 2004, 51). However, the reality reflects dispossession from colonial times, displacement by large estates, resource extraction, wage labour, etc., and the woeful inadequacy of titling procedures. Despite land reforms, Andean indigenous groups have access to small plots of poor-quality land, while tropical peoples experience ever more rapid encroachment – between 1964 and 1993, no less than 88% of land distributed through government programmes was given to non-indigenous colonizers and settlers (Deere and León 2001b, 380).

Given these constraints on full possession of ancestral lands, Ecuadorian indigenous movements mobilize to enforce existing rights and to extend legislative and constitutional provision for the recognition of collective title awarding non-alienable usufruct rights and a degree of autonomy. This mobilization came to the fore through the 1990s with demands for the 'recuperation and legalization of indigenous lands in the Sierra, Coast and Amazonia' (Pacari 2003). In the Sierra, over 120 conflicts over land were resolved through negotiation and credit offered to facilitate agricultural development. In the Amazon, indigenous peoples demanded the legalization of territories in ancestral possession, and after extended protests 1.2 million hectares were granted by presidential decree in 28

(in addition to 612,000 hectares awarded to the Hoarani in 1990). On the coastal plain, Awá, Chachi and Épera nationalities achieved the legalization of lands. The 2002 Law of Indigenous Nationalities supports the reconstitution of nationalities and pueblos based in part on the consolidation of territories and organizational processes (Pacari 2003).

An Ecuadorian government survey found that indigenous and rural women had less access to land than men. Female-headed households were particularly likely to have minimal landed property (less than half on average, 4 hectares vs. 10 hectares) (Secretaría Técnica 1998, 126). Among indigenous women, the survey found that few female-headed households had any land at all; male-headed indigenous households held on average eight times the amount of land of female-headed households (5.7 hectares vs. 0.8 hectares). Rural women, including indigenous women, were also more likely to rent land for production than their male counterparts (Secretaría Técnica 1998, 127). At the same time, indigenous movements articulated a specific gendered discourse of cultural-symbolic claims over land–territory. The main confederation Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, or CONAIE) suggested that a complementarity between women’s and men’s roles prevailed, so inequalities were largely due to colonization and European-derived bias. Female indigenous leaders are quoted to suggest that women’s overall concern was the protection of group territoriality: ‘indigenous people have not taken up the individual demand [for land]; it has always been [a] collective issue from the community perspective’ (Nina Pacari, quoted in Deere and León 2001a, 50). Some feminist scholars argue that indigenous collective land titles are detrimental for individual rights, on the basis that indigenous cosmologies universally associate women with Mother Earth in ways that restrict women’s agency to negotiate independent access (e.g. Deere and León 2001a).² Yet in workshops held with indigenous women, indigenous women ask for the analysis of laws including agrarian reform, constitutional, municipal and comuna law, highlighting the political–legal and not the spiritual context.³ Certainly, indigenous women struggle to protect natural resources required for social reproduction. As many indigenous women live in a relational engagement with a living earth, they are also resistant to a monetary, extractivist model of resource use. However, in daily practices, women are not influenced merely by local indigenous cosmologies; in the Andes, traditionally, the land is ploughed by men (and sown by women); today Kichwa women in Chimborazo plough when men migrate, while among the Tsáchila no such cultural cosmological norms prevail.

II Complex genealogies of women’s control over land

The major policy influences on land–territory’s economic and political meanings arise from neoliberal, social neoliberal (i.e. programmes targeting specific groups vulnerable to neoliberalism’s impact) and multicultural reforms over the past 20 years, shaping the reconfiguration of ‘traditional’ relations with land.

Colonial and republican dispossession and displacement of indigenous populations have been widely recognized in the historical and geographical literature, and has rightly become the basis for understanding their subaltern position in the Americas. Yet the gendered dimensions of this dispossession are less well known. At the break-up of haciendas through agrarian reform (in 1964 and 1973), indigenous women were less able to press claims to land because of official interpretations of labour contributions to hacienda economies. Despite labouring in large estates, women’s embodied work was devalued and consequently they were not granted land. According to female indigenous leader, Carmen Tene:

Although we indigenous women worked as much as or more than men in the haciendas, our work was not taken into account in these policies [of agrarian reform]. Even today, in relation to land inheritance, indigenous women don't receive the paperwork [i.e. title] except through our parents or spouses. That is, the documents are written in our husbands' names, despite the spouses' joint effort needed to buy land. (2000, 204–205)

Female illiteracy, male bias in state reforms and household power relations contributed to this dispossession. The 1964 Agrarian Reform distributed land to male household heads assuming equal benefit for all household members (Phillips 1987), yet reform laws 'explicitly excluded from consideration the work done by women in haciendas' (Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo 1991, 71). Hacienda work is fundamental to indigenous women's experiences of dispossession, 'the starting point to understand women's contemporary situation and the undervaluation of their labour power, and representation in the family, the community and in development' (Rosero and Reyes 1997, 11). Women's lack of economic–political leverage over land was used as a sociosymbolic tool in protests against hacienda power. As men were the household's official representatives in estates and women had no land rights, protests often granted women a significant role in public displays of opposition to haciendas as they could not be penalized by the removal of land rights, their very marginality making them harder to discipline (Crespi 1976; Centro Maria Quilla 1992).⁴

Prior to the 1964 Agrarian Reform (that did little to equalize land distribution), provision for 'free indigenous communities' had been established. Ecuador's 1937 Comuna Law provided small-scale collective land titles (similar to Mexican *ejidos*), in which membership was ostensibly given to both men and women for usufruct access to a combination of individually held plots together with communal pasture and forests. In return for registration with the Social Welfare Ministry, *comunidades* gained limited collective rights to land and to autonomy. The 1937 Comuna Law also granted the president of the *cabildo* (local elected council) the function of administering communal territory (Pacari 2003).⁵ Communal tenure was not a 'traditional' form but a post-colonial hybrid informed by elite interests in containing indigenous political action, and providing a cheap labour force (Becker 1999). Despite the principle of equal treatment, in practice women's status as *comuneras* is often uncertain – women do not know their rights over membership and land. Moreover, work obligations in return for usufruct rights to part of communal land consistently use female labour regardless of individual women's control over land. Additionally, many *cabildos* are male authorities, so women become marginal to discussions around community-wide territorial–land issues.

Another significant dynamic between land, gender and indigeneity emerged with neoliberal land and agricultural policy through the 1990s, which prompted shifts in grass-roots economic–political transformations as well as ethnic protest. Due to pressure from an increasingly powerful Gender and Development (GAD) state agency (Cuvi Sánchez 2000; Herrera 2003), the PRONADER (Rural Development Project [Ecuador], Programa Nacional de Desarrollo Rural) titling project (1991–1999) added a component of joint titling, listing both spouses to provide rural women with greater security and development resources. From 1999, joint title became the norm for married couples and couples in informal unions as the law and state titling practice were brought into line with the new civil code (Deere and León 2001b, 306–368). However, PRONADER did not aim to increase (indigenous) women's land security or to reduce poverty, but to bring them closer into the market (Li 2011). A project spokesperson suggested incorporating rural women in the production process to facilitate them as direct producers, to increase income and to strengthen women's participation in community organizations (Consejo Nacional de

Desarrollo 1991, 91–92). The project worked in some of the poorest regions including indigenous-majority provinces (Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo 1991, 28).⁶ PRONADER subprovincial data suggest indigenous women did not necessarily benefit as much as non-indigenous women, for various reasons: first, the comuna structure restricts land sales, women's illiteracy reduces their capability to manage legal processes,⁷ and a systematic lack of access to formal education and less information about legal procedure, as well as women's lesser access to cash for land purchase (due to lower wage rates). Moreover, the GAD policy context explains the lack of action for indigenous women as GAD officials' urban, elite backgrounds limit their perspectives on collective rights and intercultural action (interviews, 2009, 2010).

Another dimension of neoliberal land reform was the 1994 Law of Agrarian Development, which aimed at creating a market in land and breaking up communal territories. However, the indigenous movement mobilized against the government and altered legal provisions to protect indigenous territorialities, paving the way for collective land rights in the 1998 Constitution. Indigenous women were visible and active participants in public demonstrations in favour of the law's reform, which became a neoliberal compromise. Amendments to the agrarian law included protection of communal land (requiring a two-thirds majority vote to break up or sell land) and the free provision of titles (Articles 37 and 39) (Pacari 2003). After the nationwide indigenous 'Uprising for Life and Land', provision was made for the legalization of ancestral lands in favour of indigenous peoples. However, the land law makes no mention of gender rights. Deere and León (2001a) interpret this law as an example of how indigenous movements sideline women's rights over land, prioritizing collective rights over gendered claims. However, focusing on the contests between indigenous men and indigenous women downplays the equally significant factors of public policy's systematic male bias, the relative marginalization of GAD's western feminism and the male-dominated ethnic organizations (Volpp 2001). While the law's provisions for collective title did not explicitly discuss indigenous gender issues, certain provisions did protect indigenous women's access to resources albeit by default. Under the law, communal pastures and forests could not be subdivided, and government attempts to privatize water were defeated (Deere and León 2001a, 47). Communal pastures for women's animals and forests for firewood (collected by women and children) are both gendered resources. Their protection as communal resources has an implicit gender politics, bolstering women's collective and individual rights, despite the male leaderships' unwillingness to address women's concerns directly. Recent estimates suggest that three-fourths of indigenous female household heads are landowners, meaning that 22.28% of rural female landowners are indigenous women (Pontón and Pontón 2008).

Subsequent multicultural reforms extended the collective rights of diverse indigenous populations to territory while remaining silent about the gendered aspects of land and territory (e.g. Iturralde 2001). In the 1998 Constitution, collective rights were established without any indication that women were involved in these issues (Palacios 2005, 325). Rights were established under the validation of a culturally distinctive claim to rights rather than a self-determination agenda. The lack of systematic attention to women's land rights – whether as individuals or members of ethnic collectivities – was furthered under the 2008 Constitution. Arising out of a strongly rights-based and social movement-influenced constituent process, the 2008 Constitution incorporates a range of anti-neoliberal and pro-rights agendas, awaiting further legislation to elaborate core provisions (Becker 2011; Radcliffe 2012). For instance, the constitutional provision for 'indigenous territorial circumscriptions' established a framework for territorial and political autonomy

for indigenous and black communities, yet failed to clarify women's rights to land–territory, noting only the need for 'gender' to be taken into account in local elections.

In summary, during modernization and neoliberal and multicultural reforms, indigenous women have been marginalized as stakeholders in political–economic dynamics affecting indigenous land and territory, although they have been visible in the cultural arguments – adopted by indigenous movements and the state – for collective land title. Indigenous women view agrarian reform laws and programmes as a tool to reduce land rights, not a means to enhance them (Apolinario, Baños Taller de Políticas Públicas, March 2010). Multiple stakeholders – GAD experts, governments, indigenous leaders, policy-makers – marginalized indigenous women in different ways, resulting in what I term 'content-less citizenship' for indigenous women (Radcliffe forthcoming). Regardless of gendered discourses within indigenous populations, women's situation regarding land–territory results from multiscale intersections between national development discourses, landscapes of market relations, elite notions of ethnic difference and policy bias towards male heads of households. Consequently, indigenous women grapple with a range of powerful actors over land–territory, as detailed case studies demonstrate.

III Grass-roots women's experiences: Kichwa and Tsáchila women

The contests over ethnic collective territory and identity, gender policy and its implementation, and uneven development generate diverse regional experiences. The Andean Kichwa in Chimborazo and the Tsáchila of the western tropical lowlands exemplify two sites where 'authorities ... of the recent past ... are currently being challenged by new enclosures [and] territorializations' (Peluso and Lund 2011, 668).⁸ Each case demonstrates articulations between gendered resource access and use, and female–male power relations, in shifting political economies and NGO interventions that further gendered dispossession. Women's land access or property rights are constituted through labour practices, inheritance, community practices and state–NGO interventions.

In Chimborazo province, where Kichwa comprise 45% of the population, landholdings are the product of unequal distribution between haciendas and indigenous populations, inheritance patterns and little opportunity to buy land. Households generally hold around 1 hectare of land, used for subsistence and small-scale commercial crops and animal-herding. Landholdings might be subdivided into parcels of irrigated and unirrigated lands and pasturelands. The public discourse is that women and men inherit equally from parents, although this occurred *after* hacienda land was distributed to male household heads (Pilamunga, interview, March 2009). Among interviewees, the most land-poor Kichwa women inherited solely from mothers (often only a house-plot) and are unable to buy land. Nevertheless, Kichwa cultural norms encourage the distribution of land among both male and female offspring, so women expect to inherit.

While there is strong evidence of the predominance of bilateral inheritance practices in the Ecuadorian highlands, it is difficult to disentangle the influence of indigenous custom and practices from the changing conditions of production and tenancy. (Deere and León 2001b, 271)

Women scrape a living from cultivating potato, barley, wheat and quinoa, and keeping one or two cows, llamas, sheep and goats; money from occasional sales to local markets is used immediately for social reproduction. In this context, women largely rely upon inheritance to access land. However, women acquire land through a variety of mechanisms: inheritance only (34% of women) or inheritance and purchase (18%). The largest landholdings are owned by women who inherit and buy, or who buy only (4%), suggesting

that land purchase contributes to differentiation between households. The incipient pattern of land-leasing to supermarkets involves only a small share of women and often leaves them dissatisfied with the lack of autonomy over production. Among interviewees, women on average received just under half a hectare of land from parents (average 0.44 hectares; range 0.05–3 hectares). In some cases, women inherit from mothers and men from fathers in a bilateral pattern. In contrast to the Tsáchila women, Kichwa women did not talk about the markedly different inheritance for female and male offspring; indeed they mostly mentioned that parents' land was distributed equally.

Nevertheless, this response does not link easily with women's information on their husbands' inheritance (average 1.33 hectares; range 1–3 hectares). Young married women undertake productive and reproductive tasks for in-laws, in return for land (cf. Paulson 2003). A lesser value for women's labour implies that women on average inherit plots around one-third of husbands' inheritance. In two cases however, women inherited more land than husbands (not reported among Tsáchila). Centuries of dispossession means that one in five Kichwa women had no land, as parents' land had not yet been subdivided (single women living at home), as they were orphans or as parents were landless. As in Central Asia, land hunger and lack of alternative employment force women to make efforts to retain or purchase land (Razavi 2007, 1494). Eight per cent of women recorded renting land, generally extremely small plots; when renters scrape together enough resources to buy land, these again are smaller than average.

In the Andes, *comuna* membership grants usufruct rights to a scattered set of small plots of land at various elevations and to collective pastures, but the comunas are set in a patchwork of private landholdings, and land sales occur even within comunas (although this was not permitted prior to the 1994 law). Comuna territorial governance rests in the hands of an elected council, which historically comprised male household heads. Women's control over community territory was thus mediated via husbands and fathers. Through the daily practices of comuna membership, women were not recognized as equal to men, and hence did not appear on these lists. Older women recall never being included as a 'comunera'; today, many comunas do list women alongside male peers. Yet in Chimborazo, village women remain uncertain about their status and decision-making rights over territory. Although women are active participants in community work parties (*mingas*), this labour does not necessarily guarantee access to irrigation water or pastures, nor does it guarantee a public decision-making role (e.g. on irrigation committees). Public speaking and the display of political authority in the comuna remain primarily masculine, leaving women with a less authoritative relationship with ethnic territory. Nevertheless, women in Chimborazo have actively mobilized to challenge this hegemony. Women's village associations have gained recognized – albeit contested – roles in local decision-making. Male and female labour out-migration means that older married women are increasingly likely to participate in community councils and decide about land use and market relations.⁹ According to an Andean national female leader, 'Who suffers on the land or in the territory? It's the women with their children. Men migrate and don't notice what is happening' (interview, February 2009). Despite falling land values, Kichwa women struggle for greater autonomy and clarity around territorial–land rights (cf. De la Cadena 1995). Yet their viewpoints often remain silenced or marginalized outside the village, as the Andean indigenous movement is male-dominated.

With the accelerated privatization of communal land after 1994, Kichwa women are more deeply engaged in land purchases than Tsáchila women. Just over one-quarter of Kichwa women bought land although these purchases were small (however, some of the most land-rich women had purchased and inherited land–territory). For one in eight

women, purchased land represented the only land they had access to (they were orphans and/or parents or husbands were landless). Purchase is a response to exclusion, but its limited extent reflects wider patterns of economic dispossession. Women bought on average less than 1 hectare (range 4 hectares to 'little'). In one-third of land purchases, women bought land with their husbands, suggesting that the title is in joint names. These purchases were made possible with credit or with male wages and women's sales of animals. In these circumstances, women assume a double burden of rural land management and household budgeting during husbands' absence, often with incomplete decision-making power, financial autonomy or political authority to access irrigation water and communal resources. Land purchase was also a strategy for separated or widowed women, who were forced into (or chose) this route (8% of women). In these cases, women earned money working very long hours in low-paid agricultural jobs on nearby estates. In one case, a woman bought a small plot independently. Women expressed a wish to buy land but explained that they had no money or no land was available to buy.

Land purchase with husbands may reflect the lack of individual women's access to credit, reflecting national expectations about wives' dependence on a male household head.¹⁰ The large non-governmental agrarian organization FEPP (Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio) extended credit for land purchases, yet only 14% of beneficiaries were women (Deere and León 2001b, 322). Even if women have joint title to land, their financial autonomy remains restricted because lenders expect husbands to be present; sole women are not considered creditworthy, regardless of landholding size. NGOs through development projects hence consolidate processes that disempower women in relation to land–territory.

Kichwa women understand issues of individual land ownership and usufruct in terms of broader questions of rural survival strategies and surrounding resource capacities (plots, pasture, forests) (Fueres Flores, Morán Salazar, and Hill, forthcoming). Through their daily practice in gendered divisions of labour, women rely heavily on local natural resources such as firewood, pastureland, water for irrigation and animals. Reflecting deeply held notions of connection to a living earth, this quotidian interest in resources has acquired particular resonance with recent public debates around 'buen vivir' (well-being) (Radcliffe 2012). For Kichwa women, buen vivir refers to a model of socially and environmentally sustainable life that upholds the earth's capacity to provide a balanced, equitable standard of living; extractive mining projects and the privatization of water hence act against buen vivir. Village-based Kichwa women articulate an agro-ecological-territorial-social complex, as summarized by one national leader:¹¹

For indigenous communities, buen vivir is having land, having a territory, and they have to be clean, without pollution, [and] water free from pollution... for the land itself to be productive. (Andrade, interview, July 2009)

Cases of practical reworking of gendered land use exist: Women in El Troje used a village plot to produce foodstuffs collectively, suggesting flexibility in the gendered nature of land control and use (Pilamunga, interview, July 2009).

In the tropical lowlands, state colonization and agricultural frontier expansion for commercial crops meant inexorable pressure on indigenous territories, including the Tsáchila (now around 2000 people) (see Radcliffe and Pequeño 2010). 'Regular' title to community land was awarded under state colonization programmes through the 1960s (on the condition that it had to be cultivated; Ventura 2012, 43), but this failed to protect Tsáchila from ongoing land grabs. Allocation of usufruct to eight *comunas* has

consequences for women's rights regarding land-territory.¹² Tsáchila women explained how they could only hold usufruct rights over land, due to the existence of community titles. Despite an active regional land market among men, especially among non-indigenous regional elites (cf. Peluso and Lund 2011), no Tsáchila women had bought land. Tsáchila households held just under 5 hectares of land on average (average 4.72 hectares; range 1–12 hectares).¹³ Women generally received 2.85 hectares in inheritance (based on 12 women; range 1–10 hectares); by contrast, husbands bring around 5.69 hectares into the household (range 2.5–12 hectares).¹⁴ Usurpation of Tsáchila land results in the expansion of cattle ranching (which offers no jobs to indigenous women) and export plantations (that offer low-paid seasonal labour) (Li 2011).¹⁵ As land pressure has increased, so too land plots have become smaller and inheritance is increasingly patrilineal; women inherit plots insufficient to support a family (Ventura 1997; interviews, 2009–2011). The Tsáchila norm is for parents to give shares in land to both male and female offspring, although there are considerable biases that result in women's lesser, and less secure, land access. Unlike Andean bilateral inheritance, Tsáchila inheritance is biased in favour of male offspring. Tsáchila women consistently associate land-territory with fathers and, to a lesser extent, with brothers. Women generally receive much less than male siblings, and/or small amounts of land are located in natal communities and become relatively 'inaccessible' due to virilocal residence after marriage. In these situations, women are not 'on site' regularly to take part in production and decision-making which would reinforce their claims.¹⁶ Brothers received more than sisters in 45% of cases where information is available, receiving between 4 and 20 times as much land.¹⁷

As land prices soar, gender ideologies undercut the security of individual women's claims as they are considered 'second class' claimants. This is indirectly evidenced by the fact that around one-quarter of interviewees had no land-territory, living solely on their husbands'. Moreover, and as in Honduras, 'a process of racialization that devalues ... customary collective tenure arrangements in favour of individuation ... as a result, intensifies gender struggles' (Mollett 2010, 359). Women living alone, especially if unmarried or older, are likely to be displaced from land, even in natal communities. In one case, an interviewee's mother had 'lost' land (i.e. had her claims usurped) after her husband's death, resulting in my interviewee inheriting no land-territory. A common view expressed in Tsáchila villages is that women do not work the land, so do not 'deserve' it (Calazacón, interview, July 2010). By this, people differentiate between men's work in land-clearing, and marketing of cash crops, and women's work in minor clearing, small animal rearing and childcare. Although ethnographers discern little rigidity in Tsáchila gender divisions of labour (Ventura 2012), Tsáchila women's interviews suggest that the *value* of female- and male-embodied labour has divergent implications for land-territory. The increased spatial enclosure of women in domestic spaces compared with men's greater interaction with mestizo society, the market and non-village sites (Ventura 2012, 57) exacerbates these tendencies.¹⁸ Tsáchila women mention the active land market, boundary disputes and non-indigenous farmers' encroachment as serious problems. Interlocking racialized dispossession and gendered expectations of labour result in women's loss of effective control over land.

Whereas Andean women inherit or purchase land, Tsáchila women are disempowered in political-economic dynamics in part because of their symbolic role. Cultural norms of Tsáchila femininity make women less authoritative and thereby more vulnerable to dispossession. Communal expectations of gendered ethno-cultural affiliation also intervene to reduce women's land rights. According to village statutes, Tsáchila women marrying mestizo men have to leave the community as marriage is widely understood as a

means for mestizos to encroach on ethnic territory. By contrast, Tsáchila men marrying mestiza women are often permitted to reside in the comuna, retain land rights and induct wives into Tsáchila culture (Ventura 2012, 82–85). Ongoing negotiations over gendered land–territory rights arise neither simply in the land market nor from ‘traditional’ communal structure. Instead, the combination of variously scaled gender relations, ethno-cultural specificity, a state-imposed form of collective rights and failures to enforce legal provision shape Tsáchila women’s control. Unlike Kichwa women, Tsáchila women are more firmly embedded within ethnic territories, without a means of expressing or defining a sense of female autonomy or difference regarding land–territory issues.

IV Indigenous women rework land and territoriality

Through national organizations, Ecuadorian indigenous women support ethnic group rights to territory, autonomy and development resources, and they organize overwhelmingly via ethnic associations rather than feminist organizations. This stance resonates with Third World feminism that situates women’s concerns in the context of post-colonial north–south relations, lack of development, and class hierarchies, resulting in complex relations between and among women (and men) of different racial–ethnic groups. Ecuador’s indigenous women increasingly articulate a set of demands around both ethnicity *and* gender, on collective ethnic territories *and* women’s rights. Hence indigenous women reject a stark choice between collective and individual rights; instead they argue for indigenous collective rights as ‘an indispensable complement to individual rights’ (Araúz 2007, 5; interviews, 2009–2011). Indigenous women articulate a clear vision of collective land–territory governance, viewing “‘*pueblos*” rights as a unit based on territories, natural resources, traditional knowledges, and full recognition of self-governing institutions’ (Araúz 2007, 5–6).

Land–territorial rights are at the heart of Ecuadorian indigenous women’s current political activism. Unlike historic leaders (including those quoted above), the current national and regional leadership are negotiating an agenda for women’s rights in questions of land–territory. According to a national consultative document on indigenous women’s rights, territory implies ‘our right to exercise influence and control over what happens in these spaces’ (CONAIE Women’s Office 2010, 36). Leaders stress that women’s higher rates of illiteracy make it less feasible to ensure joint title with husbands (who average more years’ schooling). Moreover, rights on paper tend not to exist in practice (Mayo, interviews, February 2009, January 2011). Despite GAD, indigenous women’s rights are not systematically implemented and enforced due to ongoing racialized exclusion. Another issue is that women sometimes enter informal consensual unions, without civil registration and no marital claims over partners’ property. Leaders brought these points together in a document, based on two years’ participatory workshops with 14 indigenous nationalities. The *Agenda Política y Estratégica* (Political and Strategic Agenda) offers a wide-ranging and original critique of women’s status with regard to indigenous territory–land. The Agenda highlights how, despite the ratification of ILO Convention 169, and the 1998 and 2008 constitutions, the rights to possess ancestral lands and carry out sustainable development on them are blocked by lack of implementation of laws and government’s retention of sovereignty over the subsoil (CONAIE Women’s Office 2010, 36).

The Agenda highlights women’s direct practical experience of working the land as the basis of their demands. Focusing on the Andean situation, they stress colonial displacement and how ‘women were dispossessed of our right to achieve landed property as men were granted that authority’ (CONAIE Women’s Office 2010, 37). This framing

associates women's dispossession with colonialism (consistent with complementarity discourses from the male indigenous leadership) and developmentalism while also demonstrating that gender inequality exists in current land distribution and ownership. Women rely upon parents or husbands to award them land, as 'until recently, women could not inherit land' (*ibid.*). Indigenous women's strategic proposals for change continue to push the aspect of unequal distribution while avoiding overgeneralization about indigenous nationalities. They call for 'deeper reflection upon land and territorial rights in part through a database on women's access and control in the different nationalities and pueblos' (*ibid.*, 38). Viewing ethnic territories as a means to achieve a sustainable equitable development, they recommend that indigenous territories' management plans should be prepared with a gender perspective, food sovereignty agendas and the goal of 'buen vivir' (*ibid.*, 38). Challenging exclusion from representation and design of ethnic political agendas, women demand to be included in oversight and management committees concerned with collective rights (e.g. in national development plans).

Activism in indigenous women's networks, centred on the CONAIE women's office, is echoed and taken up by other groups. In the Amazon region, the Sucumbíos women's agenda highlights the disproportionate disadvantage faced by women when the land titling institute failed to reach remote areas (Movimiento de Mujeres de Sucumbíos 2007, 35). In turn, they call upon the national women's office to ensure women's access to property. Recently, indigenous women participated in workshops to design public policies (Andrade, interview, July 2009; Baños Taller sobre Políticas Públicas, March 2010). Women argue that indigenous territory should be inalienable, outside the market and only for subsistence. Yet indigenous women also use the market in creative ways; a group of 28 women in Chimborazo pooled earnings and credit to purchase a piece of land (for US\$20,000) to form a cooperative venture for food security and female financial independence.

Indigenous women's organizations are also pressing for greater political leverage around territory–land rights. At the 2007 Constituent Assembly, indigenous representatives were at the centre of debates around collective title and territorial rights. Based on extensive consultation with grass-roots populations, in August 2007, a Chimborazo-based network mobilized indigenous, rural and peasant women's organizations to lobby the Constituent Assembly, building on existing women's village associations and NGO support.¹⁹ Their proposal argued that 'women's rights [need] to be established ... in the pueblos and nationalities, organizations and the country' for women's rights to be named formally in the constitutional articles on collective ethnic rights (CEDIS 2007, 21). Centrally, indigenous women had to press for inclusion of gender rights:

because often, when [indigenous women's rights] are not made explicit or explained, we believe that it does not exist, or that it is not applicable to us. For this reason, we have our rights violated. We women from Chimborazo propose the explicit incorporation of indigenous women's rights into the [constitutional provision for] indigenous rights ... (Cucurí and Sayay 2008)

Despite initial resistance from senior indigenous leaders to this action, the proposed amendment was carried. Consequently, Article 58 of the 2008 Constitution reads:

Art. 58.- ... 10. To create, develop, apply, and practice their own customary [*consuetudinario*] rights which will not threaten constitutional rights particularly those of women, and of girl and boy children and adolescents.²⁰

The case demonstrates indigenous women's increasing resistance to a merely symbolic and cultural role in ethnic claims over land–territory.²¹ Indigenous women have additionally created their own creative hybrid of women's rights and ethnic rights.

Conclusions

Racialized gender bias lies at the heart of indigenous struggles over land–territory. Indigenous women express strategic interests regarding land–territory, although more in Kichwa than in Tsáchila areas. A new generation of indigenous female leaders has emerged at the national level and provinces such as Chimborazo to challenge the gender politics around land–territory. Yet indigenous women do not articulate their strategic interests in ways that challenge the overall goal of collective territory; as such, their activism challenges western feminist assumptions that women’s individual rights are better addressed outside the framework of group rights. As political actors embedded in interlocking hierarchies of race–ethnicity, gender, place and class, indigenous women find their politics challenge the uneasy relationship between multicultural group rights and women’s rights (Volpp 2001). However, a critical account of women and indigenous territorialities needs to recognize the specificities of the Ecuadorian case. The article suggests that Ecuadorian indigenous women run a fine line between a culturalist argument promoted by ethnic organizations and an agenda for self-determination and women’s rights. Women have extensive experience of struggling alongside indigenous men for collective territorial rights despite their marginalization and silencing by the gendered dynamics of land distribution and representation of ethnic interests. Although national women leaders have begun to forge an agenda to address marginalization, they are restricted by a number of interlocking factors. On the one hand, feminine status within communities restricts claims on individual usufruct rights over land, especially in Tsáchila communities. On the other hand, culturalist arguments remain at the forefront of the national land-territory agenda. Indigenous women have not yet been able to articulate a distinctive argument over the gendered politics of land and territory. Chimborazo’s indigenous women are actively involved in grass-roots actions to reconfigure the relationship between land, community status and authority. Here, indigenous women scramble to survive on inadequate plots while pushing for more participation in decisions over communal territory. By contrast, rising land values around Tsáchila communities results in weakening female control over land, although women play a key symbolic role in cultural reproduction and ethnic territorial difference.

Ecuador continues to have one of Latin America’s worst land distributions (Gini coefficient of over 0.8). President Rafael Correa has vowed to address land inequalities, framing it in populist terms as peasants battling corrupt business interests. Meanwhile, draft laws on water, and food sovereignty, generate indigenous protests against what they perceive as the government’s willingness to permit environmental degradation and mining, activities that undercut the *buen vivir* commitments of the 2008 Constitution. Ruptures between Correa and the indigenous movement suggest that innovative thinking about gendered dynamics around resource control will struggle to make themselves heard. Meanwhile, indigenous women’s agenda for ethnic autonomy and women’s rights will continue to be advanced within women’s networks. Analytically, more work is required to map out the new frontiers of land control and territorial dispossession in terms of interlocking geographies of racial and gendered difference.

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Notes

1. The article draws on collaborative qualitative research undertaken with the women's office of the main indigenous confederation CONAIE and with various female and male Tsáchila representatives. Having designed the research focus, methods and questions with female indigenous leaders, I undertook 68 in-depth, semistructured interviews with Kichwa and Tsáchila women in 2008–2011, and interviews with local female and male leaders. Concurrently, interviews were undertaken with national and regional women's leaders, diverse ethnic leaders, policy-makers and other stakeholders, and a detailed analysis of government and nongovernmental policy documents over the past 30 years was undertaken. Simultaneously, I participated in numerous workshops across Chimborazo in villages, organized by the women's representative of the CONAIE-affiliated provincial indigenous federation COMICH (Confederación del Movimiento Indígena de Chimborazo).
2. The women–Earth Mother association is occasionally raised today but notably not among women's provincial representatives.
3. These workshops on rights and development were coordinated by the Chimborazo indigenous federation's women's representative, who was critical of the male-dominated federation's marginalization of women.
4. It is interesting to speculate whether women's association with Earth Mother emerged at this historic moment, not due to a 'traditional' association but to a particular configuration of power, difference and protest.
5. This disposition provided an antecedent for Ecuador's ratification of ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Rights and the 1998 Constitution (Art. 241).
6. At a time when no national legislation or regulations favoured gender equality in agrarian reform, this was significant (Deere and León 2001a, 43). Ecuadorian government policy is criticized for 'the fact that rural women cannot be direct title holders ... restricts their possibilities to access water, technical assistance and credit' (Cuví Sánchez 2000, 23). Deere and León (2001a, 43) argue that the relatively gender equitable outcomes of Ecuador's 1994 neoliberal land law was due to 'underlying inheritance practices that were favourable' to women. However, they then argue that because of indigenous activism, the resulting law is unfavourable to (indigenous) women, forgetting that it is in Andean indigenous rural areas that more equitable distribution of land among offspring regardless of gender is more common than among mestizo populations (*ibid.*).
7. Illiteracy is not a legal limit on land titling, but comprises a severe obstacle to women's full knowledge of the legal situation and thus becomes a risk factor influencing the extent of female control.
8. Ninety per cent of Latin America's protected areas are found in indigenous territories (Mollett 2010, 360), yet neither Tsáchila nor Kichwa groups overlap with conservation areas.
9. Among Kichwa interviewees, around one-fifth had migration experience as single women working in informal urban economic sectors, which ends upon marriage. This compares markedly with other parts of the Ecuadorian Andes, where women outnumber male migrants.
10. Anecdotally women recounted how illiteracy restricted their capacity to exploit land; unable to show rightful ownership, women relied on husbands to receive credit.
11. Deere and León (2001a, 53–54) point to likely gaps between leaderships' discourses on land-territory and ordinary women. Here, the Andean leader succinctly echoed village women's interviews.
12. Parallels with Tanzania are visible here (see Razavi 2007, 1491).
13. Ventura (2012, 44) provides similar figures: Tsáchila has average household usufruct land holdings of 4–50 hectares, oriented towards commercial production of cacao and bananas, and foodstuffs such as yucca.
14. Discrepancies between the household totals and spouses' relative contribution arose from inconsistencies in recording all land sources.
15. Unlike Chimborazo, Tsáchila communities do not rely on out-migration for income.
16. Aware of this dilemma and conscious of the small amounts of land available in her husband's community, one woman said she was thinking of retaining comuna membership in her natal community while remaining married and resident in a different one.
17. In one case, four sisters received 1 hectare each, while three brothers received 8, 15 and 30 hectares (suggesting that land is unequally distributed among male offspring). The *reported* ratios of husbands' to wives' lands are not so markedly different, ranging from 10:1 to 1.5:1.

18. Although a minority of Tsáchila women are seamstresses (Ventura 2012, 62), none of the women I interviewed had an independent income.
19. This NGO was controversial as it was not affiliated with CONAIE. However, its core role in supporting a particular indigenous women's mobilization is undeniable.
20. Article 57 of the 2008 Constitution (in summary) states: The *comunas*, communities, indigenous peoples and nationalities will all be recognised, and guaranteed, in conformity with the Constitution and other pacts, conventions, declarations and other international rights instruments, the following collective rights: ... 4. To preserve the inalienable ownership of their communal lands, which will be inalienable, un-seizable (*unembargable*), and indivisible. These lands will be exempt from taxes and duties ... 5. To maintain the possession of ancestral lands and territories and obtain free adjudication of such lands ... 6. To participate in the use, usufruct, administration and conservation of renewable natural resources which are found in their lands ... 11. To not be displaced from their ancestral lands.
21. These struggles continue at the international level: see Deere and León (2001b, 262–263).

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

Fronteras generizadas de control de la tierra: territorio indígena, mujeres y disputas sobre la tierra en Ecuador

La tierra agrícola y rural se ha vuelto el sitio de una considerable atención política, gubernamental y académica en todo el mundo debido a la violencia y la desposesión, la inseguridad alimentaria y las disputas sobre los regímenes de propiedad privada. Estos temas están altamente generizados en los territorios con las mayorías de las poblaciones indígenas donde los regímenes legales superpuestos (estatutarios, multiculturales, consuetudinarios) e historias de desposesión han creado complejas espacialidades y patrones de acceso. La formalización de los derechos indígenas por parte de los estados, la reestructuración neoliberal y la apropiación de la tierra son el trasfondo de las luchas de las mujeres ecuatorianas para acceder y retener la tierra y transferir la tierra a la siguiente generación. A pesar de una creciente literatura sobre los territorios indígenas en Latinoamérica, las mujeres son a menudo invisibles. Utilizando investigación colaborativa entre dos nacionalidades indígenas, el artículo analiza los regímenes político-económicos, legales y de facto, que dan forma a los reclamos de tierra y territorio indígena por parte de las mujeres. Centrándonos en mujeres kichwas en zonas rurales de los Andes y mujeres tsáchilas en un área tropical de frontera dedicada a la agricultura orientada a la exportación, el artículo analiza los criterios y las prácticas de exclusión que operan a múltiples escalas para moldear la (in)seguridad de las mujeres en la tenencia. Las luchas de las mujeres por sus reclamos sobre la tierra y el territorio también son discutidas. El artículo propone que la tensa política alrededor de la tierra en Latinoamérica requiere un análisis generizado de la territorialidad indígena para desempacar el sesgo cultural de relatos feministas de multiculturalismo, y documentar el sesgo de género racializado a lo largo de las relaciones socio-institucionales.

Palabras claves: género; neoliberalismo; título colectivo; Ecuador; apropiaciones de tierra; multiculturalismo

土地管制中的性别化边疆：厄瓜多的原住民领土、女性与土地争夺

农业与农村土地因为暴力与掠夺、粮食不安全以及私有财产制度的争夺，已成为全球众多政策、政府及学术的关注场域。这些议题在多数原住民群体因相互重叠的法律制度（法规的、多元文化的、习俗的）与土地掠夺的历史而造成复杂的空间性与可及性模式的土地上是高度性别化的。国家对原住民权利的正式化、新自由主义再结构与土地徵收，皆为厄瓜多女性力图寻求获取、保留并传承土地的背景脉络。儘管有关拉丁美洲原住民土地的文献正在迅速发展，女性却经常是隐而不见的。本文在两个原住民民族中进行合作式研究，分析形塑女性对土地及原住民领土的要求的政治经济、法律与实存制度。本文聚焦位于安地斯乡村的克丘亚女性，以及位于热带出口导向农业边疆地带的查奇拉女性，检视造成女性在租赁中（不）安全，并在多重尺度中操作的准则和排除性措施。本文亦探讨女性要求土地和领土的斗争。本文主张，拉丁美洲紧张的土地政治，需要性别化地理解原住民的土地—领土，以拆解西方女性主义在多元文化主义解释中的文化偏见，并记录横跨社会—制度关系的种族化性别偏见。

关键词：性别；新自由主义；集体所有权；厄瓜多；土地掠夺；多元文化主义