



Gender equity in fairtrade–organic coffee producer organizations: Cases from Mesoamerica

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ABSTRACT

Data from Mesoamerican studies shows that the proportion of women registered as ‘farm operators’ in fairtrade–organic coffee producer unions has increased significantly. However, this increase is uneven across Mesoamerican communities and the prospects for improved gender equity rest on several questions that we explore in this study. First, what explains the large discrepancies in participation across groups? Second, what effect does the ‘farm operator’ status have on women’s ability to participate in producer unions and in fairtrade–organic coffee networks? Third, how will fairtrade–organic organizational and procedural norms affect women’s insertion into the coffee ‘value-chain’? Making use of ethnographic, archival, and survey data we find that fairtrade organizational norms combine with organic procedural norms to bring significant impacts in three areas: women’s organizations have greater access to network benefits, women gain greater control over farm practices, and women enjoy increased access to cash. However, we also find that the burden of complying with norms together with stagnant real prices excludes some women who might otherwise benefit from expanded participation.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade increasing numbers of small Mesoamerican farmers sought the economic and environmental benefits of fairtrade, organic and other forms of product certification. This is especially the case for small coffee farmers, and coffee has long been the most prominent certified organic and fairtrade product grown in the Global South. The available data suggest that women form a relatively important share of ‘farm operators’ affiliated with fairtrade and organic market organizations in southern Mexico and Guatemala, and moreover, that the relative proportion of women operators has increased considerably over the past decade. This paper examines this trend and investigates the conditions that have supported women’s increased participation in producer organizations from which women have traditionally been excluded. Moreover, it considers the impact of women’s participation in these organizations on gender norms and gender relations both within and external to the household. Taken together this overall increase in women farm operators coupled with a wider range of women’s participation raises three principal questions: how widespread is increased women’s participation in fairtrade–organic? What conditions contribute to and support increased women’s participa-

tion? And how does increased participation affect a history of women’s (relative) exclusion from producer organizations in Mesoamerica?

We take two approaches to resolving these questions. First, we make use of ‘value-chain’ theory, extending value chains – a version of commodity-chain theory expressly concerned with who produces value and how it is produced at particular nodes along a value-chain (see Ponte and Gibbon, 2005; Kaplinsky, 2004; Bernstein and Campling, 2006) – into villages and households. Second, we examine the rules and norms that govern the fairtrade–organic coffee commodity chain to gain an understanding of how the ‘farm operator’ status affects women’s gender roles. (Since the bulk of Mesoamerican fair trade coffee is double-certified fairtrade and organic, we consider the two in tandem as ‘fairtrade–organic’ when we assess the relation between ‘ethical’ market participation and gender equity.) In this manner we hope to gain a fuller understanding of the interplay between fairtrade–organic networks, women’s work, and value. Within this fairtrade–organic value-chain, fairtrade and organic certifications differ in character and yet combine to create a unique effect. Fair trade coffee certification centers on organizational and procedural norms required of producer associations while organic certification requirements focus on production practices, regulation of inputs and oversight of the product ‘chain of custody’ from field to cup. Existing fair trade certification standards limit participation to family producers who are

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understood to be those who “are not structurally dependent on permanent hired labor, managing their farm mainly with their own and their family’s labor force” (FLO, 2007a, p. 4). In other words, the implicit understanding is that fair trade certified coffee producers make primary use of family labor – of which women’s labor often provides the largest share – to maintain and harvest their coffee. While the Fair Trade Labeling Organisations International (FLO), which establishes certification standards, identifies women’s empowerment as one of fair trade’s ten key areas of impact, fair trade certification requirements do not explicitly address how this empowerment is to be encouraged within producer organizations. Likewise, organic coffee certification requirements include no specific references to gender equality or labor standards.

Below we critically examine the channels through which fairtrade–organic coffee production impacts gender relations in producer communities, households, and organizations in Mesoamerica. We situate fairtrade–organic coffee production within specific cultural and economic milieus, namely indigenous and mestizo communities of Guatemala and the Mexican states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, in order to demonstrate that women may be benefited or excluded depending on how fairtrade–organic practices interact with pre-existing cultural practices and structural trends, such as high rates of male migration. Our research draws upon a range of sources, including organizational ethnographies of producer’s unions such as the State Coordinator of Oaxacan Coffee Producers (CEPCO) and Guatemalan fairtrade producer organizations. The principal evidence for quantitative changes in women’s participation comes from CEPCO producer organization data made available to the researchers.¹ The import and extent of these quantitative changes is interpreted through the use of ethnographic data drawn from studies in Oaxaca and Guatemala and bolstered by a 2006 survey of 900 Southern Mexican coffee producers in Chiapas and Oaxaca that includes both organized (e.g., CEPCO, Michiza, UCIRI, Juan Sabines) and non-organized producers in Oaxaca and Chiapas.² We also draw on recent studies of these and other Mexican coffee producer organizations to temper our findings. This wealth of data allows us to draw broader conclusions with respect to the experience of women on smallholder (peasant) farms across Mesoamerica. Given similar conditions of peasant coffee farmers across the globe, and particularly in culturally similar areas of Latin America, we hope that our findings will invite useful questions.

The analysis begins with background information on the feminization of agriculture and an overview of relevant certification standards and practices. It then examines the impact of fairtrade–organic production on labor distribution in coffee households, with a specific focus on women’s changing agricultural roles. The second part of the paper assesses women’s participation in fairtrade–organic production along three key axes: women’s ability to participate (since some fairtrade–organic requirements may potentially exclude women); gender relations within households and producer unions; and women’s engagement with governance norms and extra-local networks. We conclude that women who participate as owner-operators of coffee farms reap the most significant benefits. Next we examine the increased rates of farm control among women in several rural Oaxacan communities, the

impact this control has on women’s livelihoods, and the extent to which participation in fairtrade–organic networks may result in the alienation of farm management from community governance therein constituting a form of privatization. The paper concludes that women do benefit from changes associated with fairtrade–organic production. However, the returns to women’s labor and land investments in fairtrade–organic production are declining concomitantly with the decline in inflation-adjusted earnings from certified markets.

2. Conceptualizing women’s involvement in certified fairtrade–organic coffee

Coffee production is often misleadingly represented in popular media as an activity that is principally masculine in character, as perhaps best typified by the Colombian government’s use of the ‘Juan Valdez’ character to promote coffee consumption. However, as with many agricultural commodities, gender oppression has been central to the historical development of the coffee industry (Fridell, 2007) and women play central roles in local coffee economies in Mesoamerica (Jaffee, 2007, p. 117; Chassen-Lopez, 1994; Hoffmann, 1992; Hernandez-Castillo and Nigh, 1998). In general, women farmers and workers throughout the Global South still confront lower pay, less stable employment, widespread sexual harassment in the workplace, and a double burden of wage labor and household responsibilities (Oxfam, 2004). Within the coffee industry women face lower pay and overt gender discrimination in the plantation settings. Similarly, there are several ways in which patriarchal social relations shape aspects of smallholder coffee production in Latin America. For example, men frequently have privileged access to property and income while women are required to work in both the field and the home (Fridell, 2007; Mayoux, 2001; Redfern and Snedker, 2002). Furthermore, there is evidence that despite the fact that women devote a large share of labor to coffee production labor in household coffee fields (often constituting a majority share), they often have relatively little say in agricultural decision-making within the household (Fridell, 2007, p. 132). While a significant portion of Latin America’s coffee is grown on large plantations, existing fair trade certification standards limit market participation to small producers. Therefore, the gender relations characterizing smallholder agricultural production are more relevant to the current analysis.

The changes in women’s participation discussed in this paper take place within the context of a ‘feminization’ of agriculture in which women in Latin America take on additional farming tasks and assume subsistence cultivation responsibilities traditionally performed by men (Deere, 2005; Aranda Bezaury, 2003). The changes have been driven by factors including male immigration from rural areas in search of paid labor and development initiatives privileging male household heads. These changing modalities of women’s agricultural labor confront an historical male bias with respect to agrarian community organization that has rendered women farmers invisible within the strict dichotomy that has been assumed to exist between the roles of men as economic providers and women as domestic caretakers (Jha, 2004; Spring, 2000; Bossen, 1989; Boserup, 1970). As a result, early development projects often resulted in a decrease in women’s social status and a devaluation of their economic roles in agricultural communities. While it is now an article of faith among analysts that Latin American agricultural development agendas focusing on commercialization of small-scale agriculture are likely to result in the unintended economic marginalization of women, new data suggest that institutional male bias is mediated by several factors, including ethnicity, household gender relations, and market experience (Hamilton et al., 2001, p. 1) and there are examples of female suc-

¹ CEPCO is the largest producer organization in Mesoamerica, with 12,500 member families living in over 200 villages organized into thirty-eight regional organizations at the time this data was collected. This significant size provides a useful overview since it brings in a wide range of family producers from many different indigenous and non-indigenous ethnic groups.

² The sample was stratified by ‘organized’ versus ‘non-organized’ households (i.e., households that belonged to an organized coffee union versus those that operated independently of organizational affiliations) across ten villages. Randomized producer lists were drawn from village and fairtrade–organic producer organization files. Focus groups included both organized and non-organized producers and were organized in each village, when feasible, for women, men, young women, and young men.

cess in commercial agricultural endeavors, working on their own or with relatives (Spring, 2000).

With respect to the question of gender and ethnicity, many specific instantiations of gender within our Mesoamerican cases arise at the intersections of gender, indigeneity, and mestizaje. Indigenous peoples inhabit many coffee-producing areas, and the earliest fairtrade and organic producers were indigenous groups such as Majomut and UCIRI (Union de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo). This raises important questions such as how changes to gender relations associated with fairtrade-organic coffee also affect questions of ethnicity and vice versa. Unfortunately our data are limited in this regard by the heterogeneity of coffee producers. First, and most importantly, the smallholder women farmers in this study are not in every case indigenous. Many producers from Oaxaca's 'costa chica' region, for example, have Afro-Oaxacan and Euro-Oaxacan as well as indigenous roots. Second, indigeneity is constructed in very different ways across Mesoamerica. While caste-like social relations characterize Guatemala and Chiapas, Oaxacan indigenous peoples exercise control over most local governments and many state-level institutions albeit within an overarching national political context. The heterogeneity of indigenous and mestizo experiences included in our data makes it difficult to treat both ethnicity and gender with sufficient specificity. For this reason – and because fairtrade coffee standards take special note of the importance of gender relations – we have elected to limit the scope of this article to an examination of gender issues.

2.1. The feminization of agriculture in Mesoamerica

As an effect of the prolonged crisis in Mexican agriculture – and generalized throughout Mesoamerica – aggravated by the politics of neoliberal adjustment, the number of women engaged in rural economic activities has steadily increased across the region (Aranda Bezaury, 1995). However, data from the 1990 Mexican Population Census do not reflect this reality – only 189,150 women are registered as employed in farming of a total of 5,110,964 total registered farmers.³ Information gathered by Rendón (1993) using the Mexican National Employment Survey produced a very different finding: as early as 1993, in communities with less than 100,000 inhabitants, 95% of women were engaged in farming activities. Although still well shy of Rendón's finding, the 2000 census shows a slight improvement in the counting of women, with 491,399 women out of 5,338,299 total persons employed in agriculture – more than doubling women's participation in an otherwise stagnant sector (when measured in terms of employment). The feminization of Mesoamerican agriculture is marked by three characteristics. First, the 2000 census demonstrates that women's participation encompasses an expanding range of rural occupations that includes agricultural (such as paid field labor or agroprocessing) and non-agricultural (such as rural industry, services, and commerce). Second, many women have entered agricultural production activities as a result of the labor migration of their spouses and children. A sense of these changes is provided by 2006 women's focus group participants in response to the question, 'With migration, Have the responsibilities and obligations of non-migrant women changed?':

'Yes, because women who are alone have to do both jobs, men's tasks are now done by us. The work is double.' [19 April 2006]

'There isn't anyone to work [nowadays], no-one told me, 'if you want I'll help you pick coffee', no-one.' [5 February 2006]
'Twenty-five or thirty used to come [to pick coffee] from other places, but now who knows where they've gone? No-one comes.' [9 April 2006]

Third, confronted by declining income from crop sales and a resulting 'decapitalization' of many family farms, some studies have encountered a bimodal pattern in which some families diversify away from agriculture while others intensify labor inputs (particularly women's labor) in order to avoid contracting temporary workers – which as above comments indicate are in short supply in some communities (Bartra et al., 2006).

While we do not argue that women's increased agricultural participation has had uniformly negative impacts, it is nonetheless clear that a feminization of agricultural labor often places women in disadvantageous work situations. It is also important to note that the feminization of agriculture occurs within a context of broad agrarian decline. Although far from uniform, agrarian decline is widespread across Mesoamerican regions and commodities, and derives from falling farm income as a result of declining commodity prices and a loss of agricultural jobs, including 1.3 Million in Mexico alone between 1993 and 2002 (Polaski, 2003, p. 20). The sharp decline found in coffee prices (detailed below) is repeated across many commodities, particularly since crop subsidies were slashed following neoliberal reforms and market opening since the early 1980s. This income loss has since been followed by a heavy rural out-migration and loss of youth, particularly of young men (Fox and Bada, 2008). As a result, an increased number of women has come to be employed in poorly remunerated agricultural work, leading in at least some instances to an increase in women's 'self-exploitation' as they attempt to secure a similar or diminished income.

2.2. Fairtrade-organic coffee networks and certification requirements

Coffee prices have fared poorly, losing approximately 75% of value in price adjusted terms since its 1986 peak. Since the mid-1990s, many Mesoamerican small coffee farmers have turned to fairtrade and organic coffee networks in an attempt to reclaim this lost value. Fair Trade is a form of alternative trade that seeks to improve the position of disempowered farmers by using certified commodity-chains to foster development. The movement, which promotes labeling and certification as a site of political and economic consumer action, rejects a view of Third World citizens as victims and instead emphasizes the idea that consumption can promote economic empowerment and well-being (Micheletti, 2003). While overall coffee sales are stagnant, specialty coffee sales have grown at 13% per year over the past decade and certified coffees, such as fair trade and organic, account for close to 4% of the world coffee market (Raynolds, 2010). Although fair trade products may represent a minor share of the world market, currently US\$1.4 billion, they are growing rapidly (FLO, 2006).

Despite the recent growth in fair trade markets, the market for fair trade coffee remains insufficient: nearly 30% of the world's small scale coffee producers now supply the fair trade market and FLO estimates that the capacity of producers worldwide who could meet certification standards is roughly seven times the current volume exported via fair trade channels (Murray et al., 2006). This translates into stiff competition among producer groups, such as those affiliated with CEPCO, which are often forced to sell a portion of their product at significantly lower non-fairtrade/organic prices. The Fair Trade Labeling Organisation International's (FLO) website identifies the 'empowerment of women' as one of the ten key 'impact areas', explaining that 'Important investments can be made in women's income generating activities that are

³ INEGI: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, XI Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1990, Mexico, D.F.; INEGI: Censo general de población y vivienda 2000, Población ocupada por municipio, sexo y ocupación principal, y su distribución según sector de actividad, <http://www.inegi.org.mx>.

not related to the farm, thereby strengthening their income, business experience and position in the family'. The organization Las Hermanas, a women's cooperative founded by the Soppexcca coffee cooperative in Nicaragua, and a group of female workers in a fair trade tea plantation in India are used to exemplify this 'empowerment' (www.fairtrade.net, accessed 6/25/08) on the organization's website. FLO's efforts to publicize fair trade's 'empowerment of women' are also visible in the organization's 2007 Annual Report which features eight photos of female fair trade producers (out of a total of nineteen photos of producers). Despite FLO's publicity efforts, a number of studies indicate that to date fair trade has failed to adequately promote gender equity, especially in regards to active female participation in the democratic processes of fair trade producer associations (Lyon, 2008; Fridell, 2007; Utting-Chamorro, 2005; Redfern and Snedker, 2002; Ronchi, 2002; Shreck, 2002; Mayoux, 2001).

In implicit recognition of the organization's weaknesses in regards to gender equity, FLO certification standards have been amended. For example, an appendix to the existing certification standards for small farmers states that fairtrade premiums may be used by producers for any number of projects, including, "Programs addressing gender inequality or promoting the participation of women and similar programs for marginalized groups" (FLO, 2006, p. 10). The organization also recently invited applications for a consultant to develop a "Training Approach to Improve Gender Competencies in Fairtrade Producer Support". The advertisement stated, "FLO is committed to include a gender dimension into its mission and integrate gender into the different fields of work in the organization. In this context, the organization aims at improving the gender competencies of relevant staff working in Fairtrade producers support in order to create awareness about and integrate the gender dimension in their certification advisory work" (Kuhlmann, 2008, p. 3).

The generic standards for small producers do require certified groups to follow ILO Convention 111 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender (among other factors). The existing progress requirements for this standard state that programs relating to disadvantaged and minority groups should be in place within organizations, particularly with respect to recruitment, staff, and committee membership. In implicit acknowledgement of the vagueness of this requirement, a September 2007 consultation document includes a proposed change to these progress requirements which reads:

'The organization is expected to show how they directly support members from minority groups to participate actively in organizational matters, e.g. by assuming organizational responsibilities. Special attention should be given to the participation of female members.' (FLO, 2007b, p. 10)

Organic standards, within the context of gender analysis, are more important for their 'procedural' certification requirements than for environmental standards per se. Both fairtrade and organic standards have two components: 'notional' standards such as fairtrade maximum farm size or organic compost usage, and certification procedural norms that are used to determine whether a particular farmer complies with standards. Contemporary organic notional standards such as those recognized by US, EU or Japanese governments are limited to farming practices. In the Mesoamerican cases presented here, these cultivation practices are performed primarily by men: even women registered as farm operators will generally contract out organic cultivation activities (though they must supervise them). Organic certification procedures, by contrast, have a significant impact on women's farming experiences. These procedures follow the template set out in the ISO guide 65 that requires practices such as on-farm inspections and product-tracing steps such as receipt verification, as well as ISO guide 61 accreditation activi-

ties such as capacity-building workshop attendance. These organic certification requirements of receipt verification, on-farm inspections and farmer accreditation require farmer presence, and hence have the effect of requiring absent (migrant) husbands to cede farm operator registration to women household members if they wish to continue to participate in fairtrade-organic production. Thus, as our analysis will show, the combination of fairtrade norms and organic-certification practices working in tandem has an effect greater than either of the two acting alone.

2.3. Coffee labor

In taking up the question of coffee labor, we seek to extend value-chain analysis – a means of assessing processes of value creation within commodity-chains (Kaplinsky, 2004; Ponte and Gibbon, 2005; Bernstein and Campling, 2006) – 'upstream' to include farmstead production practices. Although we recognize that value may not be simply imputed by measuring labor time (see Wright, 2004), we argue that analysis can provide insight into how innovative value-chains (such as fairtrade-organic) enmesh gendered bodies in commodity production and include or exclude women from positions of authority. Research comparing women's and men's coffee labor in our Mesoamerican cases notes two commonalities in spite of the significant differences across the region.

First, women's productive (and reproductive) tasks are socially and technically separated from men's tasks (Agarwal, 1997; Whitehead, 1985). Our ethnographic research in Oaxaca and Guatemala, and supported by an analysis of 2006 survey data including Chiapanecan farmers, demonstrates that when levels of capitalization are low, women may perform roughly twice as much coffee labor as do men. Fig. 1 below illustrates this relation for a Oaxacan village. Labor is 'sex-sequential' in coffee production, with men and women taking care of different phases of coffee production. Second, relative to men, women tend to work at commodity-chain nodes that are distant from market articulations (Whitehead, 1985). Men tend to perform mechanized tasks (depulping) and commercialization (trucking) as well as labor-intensive processes such as pruning, cleaning fields and applying organic fertilizer. Women's coffee labor (picking, washing, drying, selection) tends to be more labor intensive and 'individuating' in the sense that tasks such as picking, washing, drying, and quality selection do not require cooperation (although women often work alongside each other) relative to some men's tasks such as warehouse construction, commercialization, infrastructure maintenance, technical extension, and inputs purchasing which do require cooperation.

Similarities with respect to women's 'traditional' integration by task into smallholder coffee production are consistent across Mesoamerica. However, relative gendered labor inputs vary by degree of capitalization. Better-capitalized cooperatives, particularly Guatemalan co-ops with direct links to US-based roasters, own well-maintained communal wet mills, coffee dryers and trucks to process and ship coffee before it is shipped from villages. In contrast, southern Mexican cooperative members typically depulp and dry their coffee individually within each household. In addition, the importance of wage labor varies widely across even small-scale producers, with some farmers routinely employing day laborers while others rely solely on family members. (As noted above, highly capitalized coffee-producing estates are excluded since farms of more than twenty hectares cannot obtain fairtrade certification – though they may be organic.) Thus although the gender-segregated pattern in coffee labor is relatively consistent, labor allocation varies. For instance in many contemporary Maya communities, a majority of households maintain this gendered labor division except that women's labor is limited to harvest tasks such as picking and selection (Lyon, 2008) – which nevertheless requires significant labor inputs as noted in Fig. 1. This pattern is also

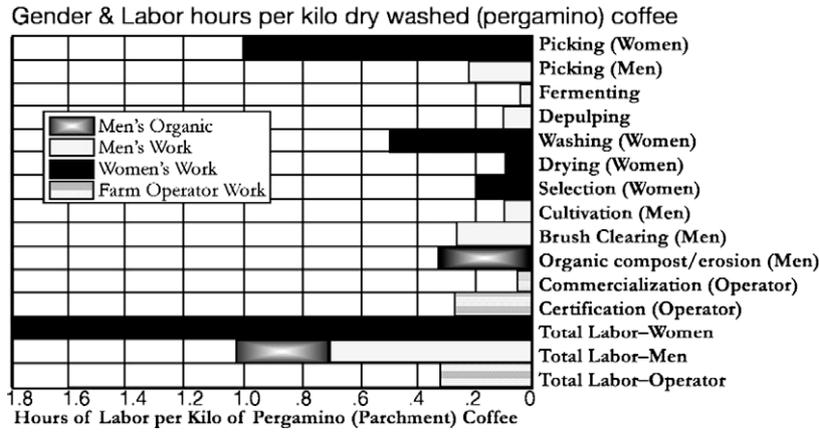


Fig. 1. Labor use in fairtrade–organic coffee by gender and operator status.

replicated in other regions of Latin America (Fridell, 2007; Tallontire, 2000; Sick, 1997).

Within this gendered labor context, the change from conventional to fairtrade–organic production methods has altered the gender balance in coffee work. On the one hand, significantly higher ‘gourmet’ quality requirements tend to increase women’s labor burdens since women typically perform key quality-producing steps such as washing, drying, and selection. On the other, fairtrade–organic cooperatives may gain access to technical support and credit support, allowing them to purchase mechanized wet mill equipment that can dramatically reduce women’s labor – as is the case for many Guatemalan cooperatives. Conversely, labor burdens for men may be increased if adverse local conditions such as steep slopes and poor quality ground cover – such as those found in Oaxaca’s Mixteca and Sierra Sur – require significant labor investments to meet organic production requirements.

3. Assessing women’s participation in fairtrade–organic coffee

In light of the historical inequities associated with women’s coffee production and commercialization, can fairtrade–organic production have a positive effect? The answer, as our analysis shows, is that yes, certain aspects of fairtrade–organic market participation can enhance women’s opportunities for participation in coffee organizations, particularly in communities with high rates of male out-migration. Following sections examine contributing factors in turn. Fig. 2 (First Pane), shows that women’s participation, measured as the share of women registered as fairtrade–organic farm operators, increased from 20% to 35% during the 1997–2006 period. These data are drawn from a union database of up to 6449 fairtrade–organic producers who were members of Oaxaca’s CEPCO organization.⁴ Although not comprehensive, our ethnographic experiences and 2006 survey data indicate that this trend towards increased women’s participation is generalized throughout Mesoamerica, although the effect is very uneven. For example, regional organizations within CEPCO show variations in women’s 2006 farm owner rates ranging from 12% in a Sierra Sur organization to as high as 62% in a Mixe organization; changes in participation over this 1997–2006 period range from +25% to –5%.

In Fig. 2 (Second Pane) we analyze this data with respect to women’s production and land ownership shares. The women’s share of production calculated in terms of hectares of coffee land lags behind their share of farm ownership, rising from 14% to reach a high of 29%. The third pane explains this discrepancy in terms of a gender difference in average coffee land holdings: women’s average land holdings demonstrate an upward trend, though not as quickly as men’s. This evidence suggests that indeed fairtrade–organic agriculture is associated with a growing participation of women in coffee production. The question, however, is whether increased participation represents an empowerment of women in terms of providing them with an increased say in farmstead operations, or whether it is simply another face of the feminization of agriculture in which women are left on the farm to engage in undercapitalized activities while men undertake better paying off-farm labor or migrate in search of urban opportunities.

We will argue that the answer is somewhat in between. First, however, an examination of Table 1 highlights concerns about the evenness of women’s participation across communities. This figure shows the total number of participants from 1997 to 2006 for nine Oaxacan villages. These villages are chosen because they are the only villages in our data set that both engaged consistently in fairtrade–organic coffee production and also retained organizational integrity during this time-span (see footnote 5). This is in part a tale of two time periods. During the 1997–2002 period, women’s participation sharply increased in both relative and absolute terms overall, although with a good deal of local variation. Fairtrade and organic norms were widely adopted but the most stringent and costly aspects of certification – particularly on-farm inspections – were only partially implemented (Mutersbaugh, 2005). In addition, quality standards were not as stringent since there were fewer global fairtrade–organic coffee producers and hence less market competition.

The 2002–2006 period tells a different story. Women slightly increased their position in fairtrade–organic production relative to men, but fell in absolute numbers for those communities with a consistent history of fairtrade participation. During this period, certification standards were ratcheted up and minimum quality requirements were increased, leading women to measure continued participation against added labor burdens. Strikingly, in absolute terms women’s participation declined by over 25% from its 2002 peak in long-term participant villages, improving relative to men only because of an even greater absolute decline in male farmers in these villages. Attrition has been linked to costly labor requirements due to organic certification and from declining real fairtrade–organic prices (Mutersbaugh, 2005). Nevertheless, this latter decline does not seem to have adversely affected (relatively)

⁴ These statistical data are drawn from CEPCO archives. We argue that it is indicative of broader trends, however. Fig. 2 (Panels 1, 2, 3 & 4) includes the whole of the organization ($n = 4064$ in 1997; 5741 in 2001; 6098 in 2002; 6449 in 2003; 5755 in 2004; 2893 in 2006). The data are complicated by the steady increase in the number of fairtrade–organic producers between 1997 and 2006. In addition, an organizational split in 2005 reduced the number of producers for whom data was available, hence the much lower 2006 total.

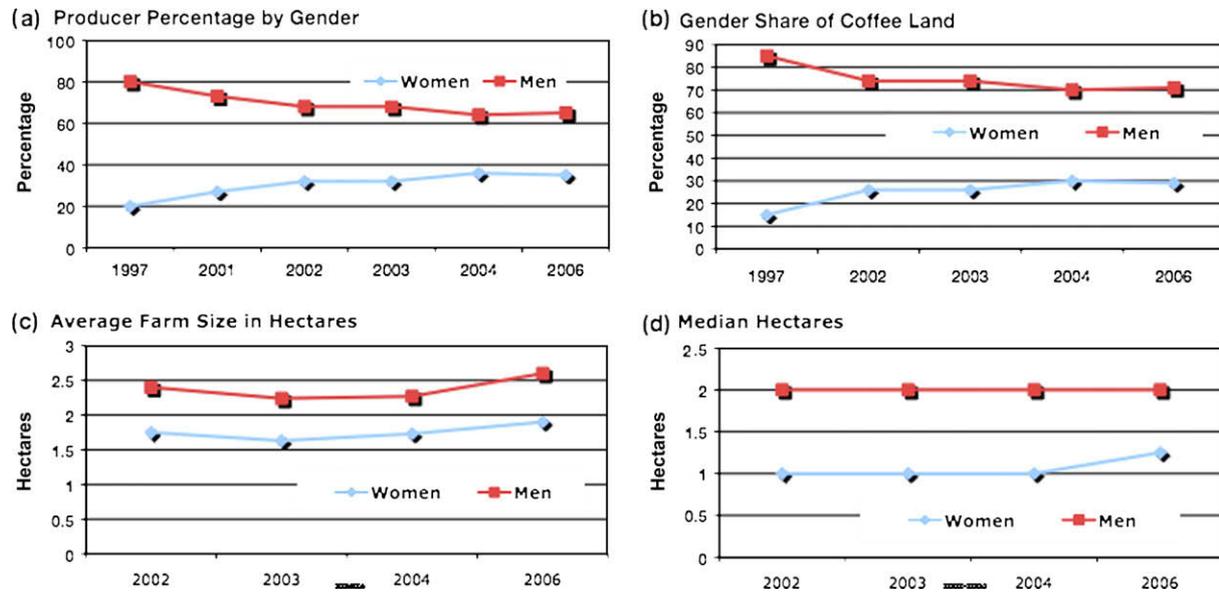


Fig. 2. Changes in gender participation in a Oaxacan fairtrade-organic coffee union. First Pane: Gender participation by percentage of registered producers. Second Pane: Gender share of coffee land by registered producers. Third Pane: Average coffee farm size by gender. Fourth Pane: Median hectares of coffee land by gender.

Table 1

Women's participation in nine fairtrade-organic village organizations, 1997–2006. (% women = percentage of women in organization; # women = number of women in organization).

	1997	2002	2004	2006
MA-% women	16.2%	20.1%	22.7%	22.5%
MA-# of women	112	62	66	51
ZS-% women	17.8%	41.3%	42.8%	42.9%
ZS-# women	18	159	142	133
ZAPO-% women	12.7%	23.8%	20.7%	15.6%
ZAPO-# of women	9	67	34	15
TACA-% women	17.2%	0.0%	16.4%	12.5%
TACA-# of women	5	0	9	6
TALTE-% women	15.7%	16.4%	16.7%	16.5%
TALTE-# of women	13	20	17	13
NABA-% women	0.0%	50.3%	51.0%	51.3%
NABA-# of women	0	77	53	41
RELO-% women	24.0%	20.0%	24.0%	24.0%
RELO-# of women	24	15	15	14
TZAL-% women	47.0%	60.0%	61.0%	62.0%
TZAL-# of women	27	72	71	68
NICA-% women	30.0%	23.0%	30.0%	32.0%
NICA-# of women	17	14	17	15
TOTAL-% women	30.1%	42.5%	47.5%	46.5%
TOTAL-# of women	225	486	424	356

poorer women in comparison with larger women producers, at least until 2004. As Fig. 2 (Pane 4) indicates, median farm size remained fairly constant until rising between 2004 and 2006. Available data suggests that fairtrade-organic agriculture is associated with higher levels of women's participation, though the sharp drop in the absolute number of women (and men) involved suggests that coffee farmers on the whole confronted difficult conditions during the 2002–2006 period.

For Mesoamerica as a whole, this decline after 2002 is common to coffee-producing regions: where women's participation has improved, it is often the result of a decline in men's participation (echoing the arguments of the feminization of agriculture thesis). For example, fieldwork shows that Guatemalan fairtrade-organic communities without high male migration rates have not experienced similar upticks in women's rates of participation (unless the organizations are funded by non-governmental organizations

with specific requirements for female participation). Nonetheless, we find it significant that women have not dropped out of coffee altogether given low prices and increased work necessary to undertake (migrant) men's tasks.

4. Effects of fairtrade-organic production on gender relations

In this section we take up the question of how the increases in women's participation registered above impact women's economic and social lives. We argue that these changes are significant, not only due to numerical increases but also because the character of women's coffee labor is qualitatively altered by the dual operation of fairtrade notional standards and organic procedural standards. First, organizational norms required by FLO encourage women to participate in village and regional organizations. Second, legal requirements of organic certification lead to increased registration of land to women. Third, increased fairtrade-organic prices and required payment procedures ensure women's access to significantly higher coffee income. Taken together, these provide Mesoamerican indigenous and mestizo women with opportunities to challenge economic marginality. In order to assess the impact of fairtrade-organic networks, we consider how fairtrade-organic production affects ongoing efforts to mobilize women's groups both practically, that is to say by improving women's immediate livelihoods, and strategically, by changing social and economic dynamics that contribute to persistent inequalities (see Moser, 1993).

We here consider the complex and often contradictory effects of fairtrade-organic production. As following sections demonstrate, requirements that work to women's benefit may also create barriers to participation, excluding women with high family labor obligations or without sufficient formal education. As our preceding analysis of the coffee production process demonstrates, women perform a significant proportion of added fairtrade-organic labor. We have analytically separated this labor into two types, 'standards' labor linked to certification standards and farm-operator status, and 'gourmet' work associated with the increased consumer organoleptic (taste, appearance) quality requirements. Although the analysis in subsequent sections reflects our principal interest in the impacts of standards labor, gourmet labor likely affects a greater number of women. As noted, women perform the bulk of

coffee harvesting in Mesoamerican coffee producer villages, and higher quality norms require additional time-consuming tasks typically undertaken by women such as multiple passes to pick only the ripest berries and hand selection during the drying process. By contrast, organic-procedural work exerts its greatest effect on the subset of women who are farm operators. For this group, union and standards tasks may be added to 'gourmet' coffee labor.

4.1. Gender and labor within households and unions

One major impediment to women's socio-economic advancement lies in their relative (to men) lack of access to regional social service and commercial networks (Moser, 1993; Hart, 2002). Agarwal (2001) identifies this as a problem of 'participatory exclusion' by which organizations such as producer unions or fairtrade networks that have been set up ostensibly to operate along participatory and inclusive lines in fact act to exclude specific groups such as women. One of the principal contributions of fairtrade-organic network engagement, we argue, is that it has the potential to remedy widespread and historic exclusions by providing women with access to information and social contacts. One path towards increased access is found in the impetus towards increased numbers of women farm operators encouraged by the 'double certification' of producers as both fairtrade and organic producers.

It is important to note that contemporary fairtrade-organic coffee producer associations across Mesoamerica have an organizational history that pre-dates fairtrade and organic markets by at least a decade. For example, several prominent Guatemalan fairtrade-organic coffee producer associations were formed during the 1970's at the height of the cooperative movement, which was heavily funded by USAID and other international lenders (Handy, 1984). As a result, many Mesoamerican fairtrade-organic coffee producer associations initiated projects to promote women's interests prior to their involvement in fairtrade. For example, in Guatemala it was common for coffee associations to invest money in women's commercial weaving projects, diesel-powered corn grinders (which significantly lessened women's labor burdens), or cooperative food stores. Similarly as early as 1992 CEPCO voted to create women's groups – which multiplied from eight in 1992 to seventy-one in 1995 – in each of its regional affiliates to help develop subsistence projects to offset declining coffee prices, provide services such as literacy training and composting latrines, and enhance long-term economic stability through increased coffee production and the construction of seedling nurseries and cement drying patios. These women's groups provided women in many communities with their first experience of formal organizations. However, in both the Guatemalan and Oaxacan cases, women's organizational efforts were stymied by two limitations. First, some husbands would not let wives participate or permit them to leave their communities for regional meetings. Second, women's domestic labor obligations often provide few opportunities to engage in organizational activities. Against this backdrop, the question becomes whether participation in fairtrade-organic coffee networks can assist women in their efforts to challenge a history of participatory exclusion.

4.2. Standards, governance and women's participation

The requirements for meetings and collective labor arises in part in various standards associated with fairtrade-organic production (Jaffee, 2007). FLO fairtrade standards encourage women's participation both discursively, by requesting that fairtrade producer organizations actively include women and via standards requirements that limit fairtrade participation to family farms. Operating in tandem with fairtrade standards, two organic 'procedural' standards, on-farm inspections and product tracing, may

bolster women's participation under certain conditions. Randomized on-farm inspections require the farm operator's presence to insure that organic coffee originates in organically-farmed plots. Within a context of high labor migration such as that found in many Oaxacan communities and which increasingly characterizes Chiapanecan and Guatemalan coffee zones as well, these 'operator presence' requirements have the effect of inducing those male farm operators whom participate in urban or international labor migration to transfer coffee plot operations and their 'farm operator' status to their wives so that the land may continue to be certified as organic. This may occur in a proactive fashion or after the farm has received a temporary decertification due to the farm operator's absence since random inspections make it impossible to know when one's farm will be certified and make other arrangements.

A second organic norm, product tracing, requires an unbroken chain-of-custody stretching from farm to market. This norm is backed by procedures in which farmer receipts are compared with reception center and warehouse receipts. Again, farm operators have to be present at the coffee-purchasing warehouse, coffee sales receipts in hand, when external inspectors check purchase receipts against household sales receipts. This also encourages the inclusion of women in the marketing chain and has the additional effect of overcoming certain commercialization practices that have complicated efforts to include women in some regions. For example, as noted above CEPCO made a union-wide effort to include women in all aspects of coffee commercialization as early as 1992. This initiative, however, encountered difficulties. Commercialization takes place at multiple sites arranged along the commodity-chain, beginning with a household-to-village-organization sale and ending with domestic or international consumer purchase. In some villages women had rarely sold coffee directly either because women did not possess the means to transport coffee to distant purchasing centers or because it was not socially acceptable for women to handle cash. By requiring women farm operators to be present for sales, the combination of fairtrade and organic standards has altered village exclusions and provided women with improved access to coffee commercialization channels.

However, women's participation in village-level commercialization activities does not necessarily transfer 'downstream' along the commodity chain. Across Mesoamerica, our studies have found that purchasing center personnel, for instance, remain male with few exceptions. This is significant, because the tasks that these personnel undertake – product grading, weighing, and receipt recording – involve forms of applied moral authority, for instance to reject coffee that does not meet minimum quality standards or manage the organization's accounts. Similarly, anecdotal evidence indicates that the managerial staff and boards of directors among Mexican and Guatemalan fairtrade-organic coffee organizations in indigenous communities are overwhelmingly male. Again, this exclusion is important to note as those filling these positions are endowed with authority and decision-making power within the organization and often beyond. Both of these tendencies may be explained due to cultural biases that continue to limit women's participation in public spheres of organizational activity. Furthermore, women often claim that while they are interested in paid employment in organizations or service on the board of directors, they simply do not have the time to devote to these activities due to their domestic responsibilities. For example, an interviewed female member of a Guatemalan fairtrade-organic cooperative explained, "I would be interested in serving a *cargo* in the cooperative but the truth is they don't take us into account, us women. We can't go to the meetings all the time but we do have interest" (Lyon, 2008). Finally, organizational participation requires basic literacy, Spanish fluency, and knowledge of accounting and administration, skills that women in many rural Mesoamerican communities – especially women of older generations – often do

not possess. Even those women who do possess the necessary skills may be judged incapable due to the history of discrimination within villages.

Union duties are quite time consuming (Mutersbaugh, 2005; Calo and Wise, 2005). As noted in Fig. 1, certification labor – which includes obligations such as monthly meetings attendance and paperwork duties – can total over 0.2 h per kilo of export grade coffee produced for midrange (and smaller) producers. Some duties also have a spatial component that may be problematic: during year 2000 interviews in a Oaxacan village, women noted that the evening meeting times required women to traverse the community after dark. Due to women's fears of harassment (linked in turn to social mores that discouraged young women's travel after dark), women operators in that village were confined to the fifty and over cohort since village custom permitted this older group relatively greater freedom to travel. In addition, regional union affiliates typically require members to participate in collective labor (such as warehouse cleaning or tree-nursery gardening) and union management activities, although women operators in single-parent households may be exempted from some duties.

Finally, organic certification procedures introduce documents and inspections routines that necessarily have a Spanish-language component. This can work to exclude indigenous women who tend to have less Spanish-language fluency than men. It can also have the effect of disrupting communication among women since some (often younger or mestizo) women may have greater Spanish-language fluency relative to older and indigenous women. This is important because women often make much use of informal, 'gossip' channels in combination with formal organizational channels to diffuse information. Informal communication of this type, however, relies upon a shared base of information, and where information access is unequal, solidarity is more easily disrupted.⁵ Finally, many key decision-making and information access sites associated with fairtrade–organic production are located in places (such as offices of urban unions or fairtrade–organic certifying agencies) that women find difficult to visit due to their relatively greater childcare responsibilities.

One interesting and positive aspect of women's participation in fairtrade–organic coffee has been their recent inclusion in organic inspector roles. Fairtrade–organic producers throughout Mesoamerica have organized 'internal control systems' at the regional level in order to manage the difficult and expensive work of internal inspections (Jaffee, 2007; Fridell, 2007; Mutersbaugh, 2004). Internal control requires village organic inspectors, a position that has been staffed by women in several organizations – especially for those villages in which many qualified men have migrated in search of employment. Women's success in these cases challenges local discourses that explain women's exclusion as resulting from a lack of skills or education, for it is precisely women's skills that earn them these positions. Since inspectors must read and write Spanish, speak the local indigenous language, perform basic accounting work and be capable of passing mandatory accreditation exams (organic certification requires accredited village inspectors), the pool of potential applicants is often quite small. Thus although women remain largely excluded from traditional leadership positions such as president, secretary or treasurer, these new 'skilled labor' inspections positions provide opportunities for increased women's participation. Interestingly, examples from CEP-CO indicate that most women inspectors are forty to fifty years of age since younger women often confront greater social restrictions on movement.

⁵ To be clear, we do not claim that this concern is exclusive to women. It also affects men's and mixed groups. The concern here is that these dynamics undercut women's attempts to recast historic gender inequalities.

In sum, this combination of fairtrade and organic norms constitutes a case of norms operating in tandem that, under the right circumstances, enhances participation opportunities for women. For example, internal control systems require that records be kept of meeting attendance and annual capacity-building workshop participation for each farm operator. Attendance is required of all farm operators, and as a consequence women farmers are less easily excluded from organizational activities. In many respects, then, norms – particularly procedural norms – associated with organic and fairtrade agriculture may enhance women's access to organizations. However, these effects have not been achieved as an intended outcome of either fairtrade or organic norms, but rather arise as unintended effects of several factors including coffee organization outreach efforts to their farmer base, the combined effect of fairtrade and organic norms, and to a lesser extent, the persistence of largely superseded private norms structures associated with the International Farm Organic Agriculture Movement, Naturland or the Organic Crop Improvement Association that did seek to improve gender equity.

4.3. *Farm operator registration: women's advance or incipient privatization?*

The designation of women as 'farm operators' recognized by fairtrade and organic certification agencies raises two questions. First, does the increase in 'farm operators' constitute a gain for women in terms of ownership of, access to, or control over land and its products? And second, might this designation contribute to an increase in private rights at the expense of communal rights? Taking up the first question, recent research recognizes the persistent 'gender asset gap' in which women are less likely to own property, and in smaller amounts, than men, and that this asset gap extends to pensions, earnings, and other measures (Deere and Doss, 2006). As Deere and Leon (2003) note, although Latin American laws are less unfavorable to women than in many world regions, women nonetheless lag far behind men, with for instance a women's share of land ownership ranging from a high of 27% in Paraguay to a low of 11% in Brazil. This they attribute to five factors: 'male preference in inheritance; male privilege in marriage; male bias in both community and state programs of land distribution; and gender bias in the land market' (Deere and Leon, 2003, p. 926).

Women's land ownership matters. Land provides security in cases of death or divorce, and studies find that women who own land or a house face a lower risk of domestic violence (Panda and Agarwal, 2005). Beyond issues of security and bargaining power, women often make different use of land than men do (Rocheleau and Edmunds, 1997; Preibisch et al., 2002). Women's agriculture may provide for subsistence needs (Schroeder, 1997; Carney, 1993), and in cases where both men and women farm basic grains, women's cultivation strategies may be more security-conscious with a focus upon guaranteeing a minimum harvest rather than maximizing production (Mutersbaugh, 1998). Although the importance of women's ownership has been recognized by legal changes that, at least in the Latin American case, have eliminated many legal impediments to women's ownership, men still maintain clear structural advantages in their ability to turn higher earnings into property via land markets and in inheritance practices that favor male heirs (Deere and Leon, 2003). In addition, as Varley (2007, p. 1743) puts it, 'the man "needs" to be the owner to maintain his headship of the family', a position supported by bureaucratic practices that presuppose that the male is the household 'head'.

A woman's status as a fairtrade–organic farm operator can improve gender equity in two ways. In Mexico as in many other Latin American countries, rights to land are acquired through cultivation. This 'land to the tiller' doctrine, popularized during the Mexican Revolution by Emiliano Zapata's 'Plan de Ayala', parallels

practice in many indigenous coffee-farming communities where land is held as a form of 'communal property' with plots farmed as long-term, heritable usufruct. Unfortunately, these forms of entitlement often do not extend fully to women, who may gain rights to particular activities, such as firewood collection, without obtaining full usufruct of family-farmed plots. As Deere and Leon (2003) note, women's 'agricultural work tends to be invisible, considered simply as "help" to the husband or as secondary to women's role in the provision of domestic labor'. Within this context, fairtrade-organic's formal and contractual recognition of women as farm operators may make visible what is in fact already the case, namely, that women manage many family farms in which they may own only a share. Furthermore, recognition of women's operator roles may allow them to alter practical aspects of farm management. In one 2007 instance, a woman farm operator complained about organic production norms that required the use of a particular plant species for indirect terracing because it made coffee picking (considered women's work in her community) difficult and even dangerous (she sported a scar caused by the plant). Her complaint prompted a certifying agency to recommend discontinuing its use in many areas. More generally, coffee plots typically consist of polycultures with trees and palms providing shade for coffee. To the degree that women farm operators may prefer food security (or some other goal) to maximum cash earnings, the operator role provides them with an opportunity to diversify subsistence cultivation, adding for example, mangos, bananas, avocados, tepejilote (*Chamaedorea tepejilote*) or other fruit and leguminous trees.

Returning to the second question, we ask whether the land registration presupposed in becoming a farm operator constitutes a form of 'neoliberal' privatization (Mansfield, 2008; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004). In our Mesoamerican cases, this form of privatization finds expression in the proliferation of novel forms of property rights attached to certified products that range from carbon sequestration to environmental services and to, in this paper, certified fairtrade-organic coffee land. These certification practices both increase the value of certified fairtrade and organic land and its products relative to adjacent, otherwise similar properties and constrain the trade of these properties and products to (internationally) registered owners. Hence they may be said to constitute the creation of a limited form of private property. The transfer of organic farms, for example, requires signed sales or transfer documents, thereby allowing the seller to recoup an investment in land improvements required by organic certification.

The question is whether these neoliberal forms of private rights interfere with communal or collective rights to women's disadvantage in a manner analogous to that of private property in land. Studies of landed property show that increased women's control over property may improve gender equity, but that this relation does not necessarily hold when that property is shifted from communal to private tenure (Varley, 2007; Cousins, 2005). In Mexico, and in Oaxaca in particular, land titling initiatives promoted by the Mexican government since the 1992 reform of the 1917 Constitution's Article 27 – which would transfer collective property to individual owners – have not made much headway beyond areas of urban expansion (Assies, 2008; Hamilton, 2002). Even many villages that have agreed to land surveys have not often accepted individual titles (Stephen, 1997) and in Oaxaca communal forms of tenure remain the norm. Certainly fairtrade-organic farm plans do not directly alter the underlying facts of ownership, nonetheless farm plans have become one of two mechanisms – the other is connected with state-sponsored PROCAMPO farm subsidies – that prompt farmers to geocode coffee plots and register them with state or private corporate entities (such as organic certifiers). These practices shape land value and assign control over that value to the registered owner, thus creating a *de facto* property. Our disquiet

results from two factors. First, women often depend upon forms of usufruct, such as the ability to gather fruit and palm flowers or graze animals, that may be curtailed by land management regimes associated with organic agriculture or simply terminated given the increased value of the certified coffee. Second, there are roughly two male farm operators for each female operator who have in turn, according to Fig. 2 (Pane 4), median land holdings twice again those of women. This gives men a fourfold advantage in ownership of certified land. Thus we are concerned that forms of privatization connected to certified agricultural regimes may result in a loss of women's use-rights that is greater than their collective gain in ownership rights (see also Rocheleau and Edmunds, 1997; Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997). This concern parallels the argument that more women may benefit from mandatory provisions for the joint titling of land to couples that establish usufruct than from strictly neoliberal individual titling provisions that may act to constrain women's usufruct rights (Deere and Leon, 2003; Hamilton, 2002).

4.4. Fairtrade-organic prices and earnings

Do women participating in fairtrade-organic networks benefit from higher prices? Our research suggests that many women do benefit, and often to a greater degree than participating men. However, this success is tempered by the overall decline in inflation-adjusted fairtrade-organic coffee prices that has reduced them to a level significantly lower than before the 1980s price collapse. Setting aside this problematic price decline for the moment, our research suggests that women benefit when: (i) conventional (non-fairtrade) markets pay women significantly less relative to men, and (ii) women become farm operators.

The farm-gate price received for coffee sales depends upon a combination of coffee quality and an access to markets that will reward quality with a price premium. Gender bifurcated markets are a common occurrence in conventional, non-fairtrade-organic market contexts. In these conventional markets, women often sell a portion of household produce independently of men and at a substantially lower price as a consequence of limitations on their mobility (e.g., inability to travel to sites where they will receive higher prices), discrimination, and product differences (Barrientos et al., 2003; Freidberg, 2003; Schroeder, 1997; Mannon, 2005). For a Oaxacan coffee-producing community, Mutersbaugh (1998) found that women earned roughly one half of what men earned for a kilo of coffee because women individually sold ground, roast coffee to *coyote* merchants who visited each household while men collectively transported 'parchment' coffee to sell at a higher price in Oaxaca City. Women elected to sell their coffee in this way for two reasons: a portion of women's coffee was comprised of lower quality non-export grade coffee, and many women did not trust men to share coffee receipts.

For women registered as *farm operators*, fairtrade-organic networks provide both a superior price and a mechanism to ensure that producers receive this higher price. (Although fairtrade-organic unions also have the indirect effect of prompting *coyote* merchants to pay competitive, higher prices in what is known as a 'spillover' effect (Tendler, 1988).) Another aspect of fairtrade-organic price structures is that a portion of coffee income must be dedicated to a 'social fund' to finance infrastructure, development projects, and operational costs. Once again, unless women are registered farm operators they are not guaranteed an opportunity to participate in village-level union decisions about how this money is to be spent. The drawback to becoming a farm operator, as noted above, is that fairtrade-organic certified coffee requires added labor and financial outlays to cover certification outlays and meet gourmet-quality standards. After taking these costs into consideration, many women find *coyote* merchant prices to be competitive.

A final caveat concerns the problem of downward trending coffee prices. Fairtrade–organic prices have been stagnant for ten years and show a sharp decline when adjusted for inflation, especially when compared with average prices during the early 1980s. This leads us to ask whether and to what degree a feminization of fairtrade–organic production may become another face of agricultural feminization in which production is sustained through the self-exploitation of rural women (Aranda Bezaury, 1988). In sum, when the history of market discrimination against women is taken into consideration, fairtrade–organic agriculture can provide a significant earnings boost. This effect, however, owes as much to procedural requirements as to price standards: fairtrade–organic payment certification through household receipt monitoring provides women with access to payment distribution channels as long as they are farm operators.

5. Conclusion

We have argued that fairtrade–organic networks may bring significant benefits to women included in our Mesoamerican case studies, but that under the present configuration these benefits accrue with greater certainty to women who become farm operators. In this article we have sketched out an analytical framework by which fairtrade–organic value-chains may be understood as unfolding within cultural and economic milieus. Women may benefit or be penalized, included or excluded depending upon how network practices mesh with existing social and economic practices. In this respect our findings complicate the notion that women's 'value' may be enhanced by bringing women into markets or through engagement in income-earning activities (Sen, 1990). We argue rather that the mode of women's workforce integration or empowerment is key to understanding valuation, whether through urban factory or agrarian labor (Wright, 2004; Hart, 2002), legal and regulatory efforts to increase women's assets (Deere and Leon, 2003; Hamilton, 2002) or in our case via the incorporation of women into alternative commodity markets.

In undertaking our analysis we have sought an understanding of how a regulated value-chain – the fairtrade–organic value chain and its concomitant certification practices – can shape, and be shaped by, gendered labor divisions and the politics of 'participatory exclusion'. In sum, the character of women's insertion into the coffee value-chain brings us yet again to reflect on the social conditions that simultaneously make women's labor less visible and permit this invisibility and inequality to be justified as 'natural'. Although fairtrade–organic networks have yet to expressly challenge the practices through which women's labor is erased and refigured in men's work, our studies suggest certain links between value chains and gendered labor practices. At a theoretical level, our work offers a critique of value-chain analyses that focus too narrowly upon one specific component. Apropos, our work views the value chain as a 'bundle' of linked quality-producing activities through which characteristics such as 'fair', 'organic', and 'gourmet' are each separately encoded via standards. These standards map in turn onto existing production practices that in turn affect the timing, content, and gendered character of labor.

In this sense our study signals a need for greater analytical specificity with respect to the processes through which value chains engender multiple, often contradictory effects. In our study the aforementioned bundle of fairtrade–organic practices encounters an existing, gendered portfolio of rights and responsibilities. Thus, for example, one element of the fairtrade–organic bundle, such as organic procedural standards that encourage women to become farm operators, may exert a beneficial effect upon a woman's ability to shape farm decision-making while another element, such as organic production standards, may limit a woman's usufruct

claims to gather firewood. Or standards requiring receipt monitoring may provide women with greater access to commercialization channels while increased requirements for meeting attendance may exclude those with childcare responsibilities. In sum, a gender analysis of fairtrade–organic quality-producing mechanisms requires an equally rigorous and concomitant assessment of gendered forms of labor, land, and usufruct.

In general terms, then, our Mesoamerican cases demonstrate that women's engagement in fairtrade–organic coffee can improve access to organizations, property, and income:

Organizations: women's engagement in fairtrade–organic production brings improved access to coffee organizations and skilled jobs. Unfortunately women's participation has tended to diminish at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy. Women's registration as farm operators acts to increase access at the local level, but thus far has not had a significant effect at higher levels. Our most significant concern is that the increased costs and difficulties of participating in farm operator activities may lead some women to be excluded from organizations in which they had already participated for many years.

Property: A farm operator status may serve to bolster women's property rights within the village milieu and improve women's ability to take farm management decisions to their benefit, particularly given the 'land to the tiller' sentiment common within indigenous communities. This mechanism of fairtrade–organic property registration may unfortunately undercut existing communal rights, although of course this effect occurs regardless of gender.

Income: The combination of higher fairtrade–organic coffee prices and receipt audits provides women with direct access to higher union coffee prices. This effect is particularly evident in communities where women sell locally to coyote merchants at exploitative prices. This may explain why women retain membership as in fairtrade–organic organizations – despite significant organizational labor costs – even when spouses have migrated.

In sum, we find that the combination of fairtrade notional and organic procedural standards that operate in tandem within fairtrade–organic networks can provide relative benefits to women, particularly if they are registered as farm operators. However, given the decade-long stagnation of fairtrade–organic prices we are concerned that an increase in women's participation may reproduce the longstanding and oft-noted tendency for women to take up lower paying and labor intensive aspects of the household economy as men shift to more remunerative – if risky – options such as migration.

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