

***DOI MOI* AND ITS DISCONTENTS:
GENDER, LIBERALISATION, AND
DECOLLECTIVISATION IN RURAL VIET NAM**

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways in which liberalisation processes and the decollectivisation of agriculture have impacted on gender relations in Viet Nam. In Viet Nam, decollectivisation entailed a highly egalitarian land redistribution and so presents a nearly unique case study. I discuss two sets of theories: market transition theory and feminist theories analysing the household and household production processes. While market transition theories offer some insights into the differential effects of liberalisation, they do not address aspects of women's work outside the formal economy. In contrast, feminist theories are able to comprehend the complex and interlocking nature of households, lineages, and the wider economy for women's lives and work.

I argue that collectivisation of agriculture presented some advantages for women, in that some work was socialised, and earning work points made their work more visible than it had been within peasant households. Decollectivisation and capitalist market relations have offered opportunities for some: for instance, Vietnamese women's role as market traders has been restored. Agricultural productivity has risen, and this has benefited women as well as men. However, this process also restores much more control to male household heads. New property laws give wives the right to have their names on title deeds, along with husbands; however, this is rarely enforced. The majority of peasant women face a loss of services, increased economic instability, and increased risk. New forms of labour organising may be needed to assist rural women in realising land and other rights.

INTRODUCTION

This article concerns gender and workplace rights in an unusual setting: small farms in an economy in transition from state socialism to a capitalist market. For most people in the West or global North, the term “workplace” brings to mind images of factories, shops, offices, or computer terminals. However, it is only as of 2006 that the majority of people in the world have become urban (People and the Planet, 2007). Thus, for many women, the “workplace” is a farm, a plantation, or some other type of agricultural unit.

The concept of “rights at work” is virtually never applied to peasant women. Most of their work takes place within households and smallholdings, under the direction of husbands or fathers, and so is invisible and easily forgotten. Yet their situation is similar in some ways to that of labourers. In some parts of the world (especially sub-Saharan Africa), women carry out most of the farm work, but women in the main do not have property rights on the same basis as men. With the exception of some matrilineal societies, land rights are usually held by men, either individually or collectively.

A large number of settings in which rural women work are Soviet-type transitional societies: a large reorganisation has taken place, affecting millions of rural people. The advent of capitalist market relations has had mixed implications. Some social groups have become more prosperous as a result of transition, and a minority of women who are well positioned in class terms may gain economically. At the same time, the majority of peasant women face a loss of services, increased instability and risk, and a return to privatised household-based production.

The article focuses on a case study of transition, that of Viet Nam, and also offers some comparisons with other transition countries. It discusses the ways in which decollectivisation of agriculture and liberalisation processes more generally have impacted on gender relations and upon women’s lives. The article explores the question of which theoretical frameworks might assist in conceptualising the situation of rural women in Viet Nam and elsewhere in the developing world. It briefly examines market transition theory, and concludes that this is of some applicability. However, the theory and variants of it focus primarily on the formal economy and so cannot capture the work and household situations of rural/peasant women, who rarely earn wages. Instead, theories derived from the feminist economics, development, and social anthropological literature are able to analyse women’s lives and situations in a more holistic manner. In other words, it is not possible to understand rural women’s work lives and the need for workplace rights narrowly, without considering other aspects such as household and community relations.

The article is organised as follows. It first discusses market transition theory and some applications that explore gender dimensions of market transition such as wage differentials. It then outlines the ways in which feminist theories of household economies and of gender subordination might assist in understanding

the gender implications of transition, particularly in rural areas. The second section gives an overview of the gendered implications of collectivisation and of decollectivisation. The bulk of the article discusses the Vietnamese case, ending with a brief comment about prospects for employment within export-oriented industry. The concluding section suggests some ways forward for rural women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Market Transition Theory and Its Applications

Market transition theory, first proposed by Nee (1989), aims to predict (some) socio-economic impacts of transitions to market-based economies. The theory posits that in former state socialist societies, the shift from “hierarchies” or a redistributive economy to a market-based economy changes the basis of power and privilege from those in charge of redistributive decision making to groups exercising market or market-like power. Nee (1989) predicted that direct producers would gain in relation to those managing redistribution in relevant sectors of the economy, including agriculture. In market conditions, there exists a greater return for individual effort, as indicated by higher returns for education, a good predictor of human productivity. Finally, Nee’s “market opportunity thesis” indicated that alternative avenues of mobility would be opened up within market conditions; these would be based on entrepreneurship and control over market/capitalist activities. Cao and Nee (2000), although they noted that the theory could be applied to urban settings, discussed rural settings in China because agricultural decollectivisation combined with private entrepreneurship represented a relatively simple form of market transition. They noted that there existed a general consensus over the predictions concerning returns to human capital and the new opportunities created by the private sectors. Debate exists, however, over the role of cadres and ex-cadres in new economic situations and over the extent to which ex-cadres were/are positioned to benefit to retain power or control in the new market conditions. Although this debate is of importance, it is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, market transition theory is of some relevance to the argument here. It indicates that some social groups who acquire market control benefit while others (for example, cadres or other state functionaries) tend to lose out within transitions. This insight is of value, particularly as most rural men are better positioned than women within their households to grasp any advantages within market economies. But the theory as presented initially did not discuss the gender implications of transition. For instance, it is posited that “direct producers” (peasants) gain when central controls over agricultural prices are relaxed. Although this is the case, the fact that peasants are female as well as male is overlooked: Chinese rural women do not exercise the same degree of control over the production process as do (most) men.

One aspect of the gender differentials has been explored in the literature, however: wage differentials between women and men. The prediction of market transition theory in this respect (Brainerd, 2000; Liu, 2004) is that the relaxation of central controls may allow employers to discriminate against women or other groups; however, discrimination is assumed to be “costly” in conditions of competition. Therefore, markets may foster different tendencies but overall should narrow the gap between male and female wages. Brainerd (2000), for instance, carried out a comparison of data on gendered wage differentials from several transition countries in eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union. She found that in all eastern European cases the gender wage gap did decrease as predicted, as expected in market transition theory. It is worth noting that in the case of the former German Democratic Republic, the wage differential appeared to decrease in part because many formerly employed women *left* the labour force due to retrenchments. In Russia and the Ukraine, the gender wage gap widened considerably (Brainerd, 2000). Brainerd posits that this was due to the very low minimum wage that was set, which disproportionately affects women as low-waged workers. Additionally, in more developed (European) market economies, central planning has been replaced with other regulatory mechanisms such as collective bargaining and incomes policies. In contrast, Russia and the Ukraine are much less regulated economies. It could be inferred that state regulation within market conditions may advantage women workers whereas market competition alone may not.

Vietnamese Studies of Market Transition and Gender

Two Vietnamese studies exploring gendered aspects of market transition are outlined here, one concerning wage differentials and the other concerning down-sizing. Liu (2004) discusses gender wage differentials, comparing data from the Vietnam Living Standards Surveys for 1992/93 and 1997/98. In general, she found that Viet Nam has more pay equality than most transition economies; however, women’s wage position relative to men’s declined between 1993 and 1998 (2004: 587), the period after large-scale closures of state enterprises. One of Liu’s findings was that most educated women employed in the state sector left the formal for the informal, unwaged labour force, whereas most men remained in waged employment (2004: 588). Overall, Liu found that discrimination against women in Viet Nam, based on the Confucian ethic, remained an important obstacle to gender wage gap convergence. She argues that further market deregulation would increase competitiveness and reduce discrimination in Viet Nam.

Another Vietnamese study presents a somewhat broader view of gendered aspects of transition (Rama, 2002). Rama acknowledges that comprehensive liberalisation is likely to affect men and women differently; however, little is

known about the gendered effects of transition within developmental contexts. The scant literature, Rama writes, can be summed up in four hypotheses:

1. Women's prospects for salaried employment should improve. This is because whereas import substitution industrialisation and capital intensive industry benefit men as the main employees in these sectors, export-oriented "lighter" industry tends to employ women (World Bank, 2001, cited in Rama, 2002).
2. Economic reforms can affect gender wage gaps through the "decompression" (that is, widening) of labour earnings. If, for instance, women have lower educational levels than men, earnings gaps will increase. However, reforms give incentives to employers to hire lower-cost female labour.
3. Where downsizing has occurred, women suffer disproportionately. Women tend to suffer redundancy and larger drops in compensation, and with the loss of employment comes the loss of valued services in the state sector, such as maternity pay; childcare, and more flexible work.
4. Women are more likely than men to withdraw from the labour force after downsizing.

Rama undertakes a detailed analysis of the gendered effects of downsizing in state-owned enterprises in Viet Nam, which took place in the 1990s. However, only 5% of the labour force worked in such enterprises (Rama, 2002: 169). He argues that although the massive downsizing of state enterprises undertaken during the 1990s harmed women disproportionately, further reform would not. This is because new export-oriented industries have developed, industries in which women are more likely to be employed. Prospects in the export-oriented sector are discussed briefly below; however, it is worth noting that Rama's own data indicate that "female" industries such as footwear production are also the industries most likely to offer only short-term and temporary contracts. Thus, the "gender gap" is greater than is revealed by earnings alone: women face greater economic insecurity than do men within transition (Rama, 2002). The grounds for optimism evoked in the study are, therefore, not entirely clear.

From the short reviews offered above, it is evident that analyses in terms of market transition theory do take some aspects of gendered experience into account. However, they concentrate on the formal economy or else on measurable outputs such as those of small farmer production for the market. The concentration on wages and the wage gap when discussing gender fails to capture the experience of most women (or of many men) even in urban sectors, since most people in developmental contexts work in the informal sector, and many are unwaged. Even fewer rural women earn wages as a main livelihood source. As noted, women peasants in most social contexts are positioned very differently from men in their own households and beyond.

Women like men are "direct producers" in agriculture in many societies, but decollectivisation has affected them differentially. In order to understand the

gendered impact of decollectivisation and liberalisation, it is necessary to turn to other theoretical frameworks, developed within feminist writing.

Feminist Critiques

Feminists working in political economy, sociology and anthropology, and development studies have analysed the household and household relations, including domestic labour, as a prime—although by no means the only—basis of gender subordination for women, over more than three decades. Folbre (1986) commented that both neo-classical and Marxist analyses tended to treat the household as a “black box” ruled over by a benevolent dictator (the “household head”). The household and women’s labour within it were therefore not in need of further analysis. An alternative is to view the household as a particularly privileged site of exercise of gender power and (often) of gender inequality in several spheres, including production, consumption, “reproduction” or care of children, and the exercise of power and autonomy. Households may, of course, also be sites of cooperation, commensality, care, and nurturance; a mixture of “cooperative conflicts” is often entailed (Sen, 1990). Not only are women’s lives lived more within the physical confines of houses than are men’s, but their life-chances are also more linked to household and kinship roles and much of their labour is organised within households. The composition and organisation of households have a direct impact on women’s lives and on their ability to gain access to resources, labour, and income (Moore, 1988). As Razavi (2000: 243) notes in a discussion of women in export-oriented industry, “The . . . implications of labour market entry cannot be divorced from context-specific kinship and familial relations that pattern the relation between work and well-being.” Moreover, gender is a status that women in nearly all societies and social positionings are unable to leave: they are virtually always seen as gendered and sexualised beings (Whitehead, 1979/2006).

Gendered norms are not evident only within households and household relations: communities and societies more widely are of great importance. But households are of prime importance in discussing the situation of rural women. This is because in smallholder or “peasant” economies, “productive” (agricultural and craft) work is not easily separated from “reproductive” work (Edholm, Harris, & Young, 1977), that is, biological reproduction, the reproduction of labour, and social reproduction. These types of work take place largely in the same place—the household/farm—meaning that this type of economic unit may be particularly constraining for women smallholders.

Market transition theory implicitly assumes that capitalist market relations will erode the gender inequalities stemming from traditional sources such as kinship or religious and social beliefs. Whether or not this is the case for more advanced capitalist societies, it is of little applicability to the case of agricultural decollectivisation within developmental contexts.

“Transition” to the market has had the effect of re-privatising women’s work within smallholder households. Thus, as indicated above, a broad understanding of the notion of workplace rights is needed. For smallholder/peasant women, the workplace is not only constituted in gardens and fields but also within the home. Workplace relations are not (or not only) those of employer/employee; they are also relations of kinship, marriage, and sexuality.

At this point in the discussion, I provide an overview of the gendered effects of collectivisation and decollectivisation, before examining Viet Nam as a specific case study.

COLLECTIVISATION AND DECOLLECTIVISATION

Gender and Collectivisation

Collectivisation was carried out with little explicit attention to any implications for gender relations. The implications for the household and the wider gender relations of collectivisation were in a sense recognised: however, they were recognised rather by the common rumours and counter-propaganda to the effect that agricultural collectivisation would also mean the collectivisation of women. Such fears of very dramatic change in gender relations were mainly unfounded. However, to the extent that various collective forms took economic functions away from smallholder and tenant households, these affected their workings and the roles of men and women within them. In particular, collectivisation took some (or all) direction of agricultural labour away from the “head of household” to another body such as the collective committee, to cadres or to an administrative authority (Asztalos Morrell, 1999; Nolan, 1988). To the extent that welfare services were provided (for example, medical services, childcare, schooling, and care of the elderly) (Meurs, 1999) women’s burdens of work were eased.

Collectivisation did not provide equality for rural women, but it did effect some advances. In most cases, women became members of collective units. It was very rare, however, for collectives to take responsibility for reproductive/domestic labour (Disney, 2004), so that the dual burden of collective and domestic work was very heavy. In situations of wartime mobilisation, women are more likely to become full collective members, to undertake highly skilled work, and to assume leadership positions, as in Viet Nam (Korinek, 2003).

Women’s work in collectives, like men’s, was rewarded with work points, although fewer than those that men received. Despite this discrimination, women’s work was made visible and it thus gained public status. In the removal of (part of) women’s work from the direct sphere of “household” control, some of men’s customary power and status may be undermined. It is this aspect that is the subject of most “resistance” and conflict (Asztalos Morrell, 1999; Wiergsma, 1991). Individual husbands and fathers in many societies have property-like rights

over women in their families, and this is particularly important where the household also constitutes an economic unit.

Women may benefit from collective governance or from related institutions such as special women's organisations (Howell, 2000). These were nearly always a feature of Soviet-type states. An advantage of the existence of public governing bodies on which women had the right to some representation was their ability to raise some, even if limited, issues (Kandiyoti, 2003). Alternatively the women's organization or committee might intervene in disputes. The existence of governing councils in cases where there is official attention to gender equity may provide a degree of protection for women's legal rights.

Gender and Decollectivisation

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, collectives and producer cooperatives were usually privatised, in line with wider liberalisation and privatisation policies. Land was sometimes returned to the "original" owners; alternatively, it was redistributed to peasant smallholders. Decollectivisation concerns, in the first instance, privatisation or parcellisation of land. However, its repercussions are wider. Decollectivisation is nearly always accompanied by marketisation, withdrawal or diminution of the state and state services, and wider economic changes.

Forms of landholding vary, but the most common is the redistribution of land to a household or household "head." (Jacobs, 1997, 2006). Alternatively, land may be held by spouses jointly. In some cases of decollectivisation, wives gain land rights along with husbands, and female heads of household usually gain some rights. In practice, however, wives often find it difficult to assert such rights, particularly where land is customarily held by and passed on to males.

Widespread unemployment or underemployment is a feature of many transition economies (Holzner, 1995; Meurs, 1997). This is due to a variety of factors linked to privatisation, deregulation, and general economic contraction. In rural areas, jobs in former state enterprises are lost, affecting women disproportionately. In eastern Europe, women often formed the majority of white collar employees on collectives, and sometimes filled technical positions (Holzner, 1995). The general retreat of the state also affects employment, since women are often employed in service positions within the health or education sectors. Some accounts (e.g., Kandiyoti, 2003, on Uzbekistan) noted the nostalgia with which women remembered their former waged employment. Further, the withdrawal or diminution of services and state benefits usually increases women's workloads. With the end of services provided by collectives, such as day care for children and the elderly, retirement homes, and health care, women may assume near-total responsibility for these services.

Feminisation of agriculture or of related sectors such as forestry (Liljeström, Lindskog, Ang, & Tinh, 1998) has taken place in many places across the world

(Jacobs, 2006). This is heightened by general processes such as increased migration with liberalisation and the need to diversify livelihoods. A related trend, especially evident in Europe, is the ageing of the agrarian labour force (Holzner, 1995). All of these processes accompanying decollectivisation further increase rural women's workloads.

More positively, marketisation does present opportunities for trading and enterprise. In Hungary, some rural women have successfully set up enterprises and find that this fits in with family responsibilities (Momsen, Szörényi, & Timar, 2005). However, these opportunities are more often outside agriculture. In most ex-collectives, women are "weak" players with little capital and are unlikely to be able to set themselves up as small capitalist farmers. Some women are likely to find success as smallholders or entrepreneurs, but it is an open question whether such experiences can be generalised.

The case of Viet Nam illustrates some of these general points as well as features unique to the country.

VIET NAM

Viet Nam is a largely agrarian country and approximately 74% of the population live in the countryside (*World Guide*, 2005: 602). This contrasts with eastern European cases in which agriculture may now constitute only a small sector of the economy, or cases such as Russia, which have experienced *re*-agrarianisation with economic collapse (Burawoy, Krotove, & Lytkina, 2000). Viet Nam is one of the few cases of egalitarian decollectivisation in existence: this presents a nearly unique opportunity to discuss its effects within a peasant-based economy.

Notes on Traditional Society

Traditionally, three types of tenure obtained: state, communal (that is, the land of the village or the pagoda), and private, constituting 80% of land (Tran, 1999: 96). In the early 19th century, 92% of northern households had holdings categorised as "small" (under 3.6 ha). In the south, with a smaller population, larger holdings were common (Tran, 1999). Throughout the country, the great majority of peasants cultivated the land of landlords.

Gender regimes for the majority of Vietnamese, the ethnic *kinh*, were framed by Confucian ideas due to 10 centuries of Chinese colonial rule. Lineage systems emphasised patrilineality and son preference (Luong, 2003). Sons afforded and afford status and legitimacy to their parents within the community. They also have important religious functions since only they can perform funeral and ancestral cult rituals. The "three obediences" for women (to father, husband, and adult sons) were enjoined.

Kinship patterns in Viet Nam, however, were and are also influenced by the more egalitarian gender patterns of southeast Asia. Unlike the situation in Han

China, women were *recognised* as being economically active. This applied particularly to women in their positions as traders (Pham, 1999). Due to this and to the accompanying recognition that women could handle money, women often controlled the family “purse” (Pham, 1999). Women were also involved in agricultural activity, and agriculture in Viet Nam has long been seen as an activity involving both sexes. Men usually ploughed but could not farm without women to perform tasks such as transplanting rice seedlings (White, 1982). Additionally, a minority of women inherited family property. In Viet Nam, women were able to maintain links with maternal kin, due to endogamous marriage norms (Luong, 1989). However, women’s rights to houses and land are much less strong than men’s. As elsewhere, marriages were accompanied by bridewealth and dowries; child marriage was frequent, and polygyny and concubinage were permitted (Luong, 2003). Residence was patrilineal and husbands’ families usually had custody of children in case of divorce. Again, as elsewhere, violence against wives, particularly younger wives, was common.

Collectivisation and Gender in the North

Women in the north were first mobilised by the (then) Indochinese Communist Party in the anti-colonial movement through its organisation, the Women’s Union (WU). Partly due to the influence of the WU, the Viet Minh in the newly divided north gave women a share of land in areas they controlled (Tétreault, 1994). Several writers note the interrelation between women’s later mobilisation in the American war, their politicisation, and the eventual success of the war and land reform campaigns (Tétreault, 1994; White, 1982). Women often emerged as radical activists in anti-landlord campaigns, protesting against sexual as well as economic abuse (Eisen, 1984). During such campaigns, women were sometimes elected to village leadership posts, an entirely new phenomenon.

The movement for collectivisation, from 1960, was Party led and included little democratic participation but, as noted, was nonetheless relatively non-coerced. Women, especially young women, were among the first to join the cooperatives. It is not coincidental that the new marriage regulations were introduced at the same time that cooperativisation campaigns attempted to widen the agrarian unit (White, 1987). Women who were trapped in traditional arrangements joined the cooperatives in order to gain independence from in-laws.

Marriage laws were aimed at outlawing “feudal” practices and bringing women into the formal workforce. In the North, the 1960 Marriage Law outlawed polygyny, concubinage, child marriage, and forced marriage; it banned dowries and bridewealth and set minimum marriage ages for men at 20 and women at 18 years (Pham, 1999). Although these measures were standard in socialist marriage laws, the Vietnamese law went further, giving women more rights to child custody, legitimising children born out of wedlock, outlawing wife beating,

giving wives rights to communal property, and banning the exercise of power by one spouse over the other. Thus the law eliminated most of the articles of the Gia Long Code, which was based on Confucian principles (Pham, 1999). Later, in 1986, the marriage law was strengthened (see below).

Within collectives, women remained disadvantaged vis-à-vis men, despite being awarded work points as individuals. They were responsible for domestic labour and a great deal of work in garden plots, and much of the work they did gained fewer work points than men's work did (Eisen, 1984; Wiergsma, 1988). One day's transplanting earned a woman 10 points and fertilising earned 8 points. Men's work earned more: a workday ploughing earned 12 points; a day's carpentry, 14 points (Tran, 1999: 99). In some cooperatives, nevertheless, women's tasks earned maximum work points (Houtart & Lemercinier, 1984). Meanwhile, men remained more reluctant to join cooperatives due to the threat to their independent status and their control over women. The war was also important in shifting gender roles. Women moved into diverse economic roles, backed up by the state, which absorbed some tasks of social reproduction, such as childcare. Nevertheless, women remained responsible for most domestic labour along with collective production and therefore had extremely heavy workloads (Luong, 2003).

Cooperatives predominated, but conflicts between the collective and family economies were apparent. The collectives lacked the administrative capacity to supply many basic necessities. The importance of the family economy was most visible in the persistence of garden plots. Wiergsma (1988, 1991) gives a powerful analysis of male peasant influence on the reconstitution of patriarchal authority; she links the preservation of patriarchy to the preservation of a middle peasantry, which remained influential at local party levels.

Thus, the socialist state made large concessions to traditional male-centred family norms.

After the war ended in 1975, demobilisation caused changes within cooperatives. Many female managers were replaced by returned male officers who considered it demeaning to be directed by women (White, 1989). Most "higher"-level, more technical work came to be more dominated by men, into the 1980s. The state's intention had been to further collectivise agriculture; however, agricultural productivity, which had risen, now fell. Although Viet Nam managed to return to pre-conflict levels of food production by 1982, growth then stagnated (Kabeer & Tran, 2002: 109). The American war had devastated the country, leading to the death of at least a million people (Korinek, 2003: 264), causing ecological and economic devastation, mass displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and lasting ecological damage. This war was followed by other, although less pervasive, conflicts in the 1980s, with China and then Cambodia. The effective U.S. embargo and the withdrawal of Soviet aid inflicted more economic damage, so that a discussion of Vietnamese economic performance must be understood in this context.

The mixed popularity of collectives was a factor in stagnation in agriculture. Peasants, especially male peasants, often resisted collectives, resistance taking the form of everyday actions such as cutting corners in fieldwork, appropriating small amounts of collective land, or overusing draft animals (Houtart & Lemercinier, 1984; Kerkvliet, 2006; Scott, 1985).

Decollectivisation and *Doi Moi*

A new subcontracting system was instituted from 1981, ceding a great deal of control to male family heads. In this system, the cooperative contracted for the delivery of final products with individual households. From 1988, household rights over land were further strengthened and a much fuller decollectivisation was initiated in the *doi moi* (renovation) policy. Cooperative lands were leased to farming households for 10–15-year periods (Tran, 1999).

The redistribution of former collective farm lands was egalitarian (Luong & Unger, 1998: 65). Very low land ceilings of 2–4 ha. were imposed, so that peasant holdings became relatively equal (Watts, 1998). Decollectivisation was very rapid and a Chayanovian¹ peasantry has been established (Watts, 1998).

In 1993, a new land law was enacted, giving longer periods of use rights to households: 20 years for annual crops and up to 50 years for perennials such as trees and coffee bushes (Tran, 1999: 101). In effect, a land market was permitted (Dao, 1995). Use rights can be transferred between individuals and families, and landlessness and differentiation became more of a possibility. By the late 1980s, much of the land in the south had been returned to pre-collective owners and a sizeable rural landless class had emerged (Kabeer & Tran, 2002; Korinek, 2003: 62). In the north, landlessness remains much rarer, but the poorest people risk confiscation of their land if they cannot meet production quotas (Gammeltoft, 1999).

Land rights certificates are issued by local authorities. Unmarried women, widows, and women with absent husbands should receive land use certificates in their own right: these categories constitute 17%–32% of rural households (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations [FAO], 2005a; FAO, 2005b: 67). Wives should also be allocated land along with husbands. However, men are often the only people named on household certificates (Gammeltoft, 1999), meaning that wives' rights to land and housing may become highly contingent. Kabeer and Tran found in four northern and southern villages that land

¹A. V. Chayanov held that a particular “peasant economy” existed, which was separate from feudalism or capitalism, and which was egalitarian in nature (Chayanov, 1989). My use of “Chayanovian” here is loose, and does not imply agreement with Chayanov’s theory, which tends to ignore differentiation among peasants, or that a wider capitalist (or other) economy exists. However, Viet Nam’s conditions do approximate to the conditions envisaged by Chayanov.

had been registered in most households only in the man's name. Co-ownership was far more common in the north, with figures for the two villages studied being 20% and 27% as against 1–3% in the south (Kabeer & Tran, 2002: 183). Many of the women respondents in their study complained that the distribution process had been unfair, and that the land committees—mainly populated by men—had not consulted them.

With *doi moi*, other features of the collective period were curtailed or ended. The cooperative structures were in the main liquidated and state marketing structures abolished (Watts, 1998). The household registration system had (as in China) controlled migration; this was loosened and so migration became very common. The marketing sector and the informal economy have flourished, and this has enabled women to re-enter traditional roles as market women (White, 1989). Productivity rose sharply as did food consumption: child malnutrition became much less common (Korinek, 2003). Viet Nam has become the world's second largest exporter of rice, and exports of other crops such as tea, tobacco, and coffee have risen dramatically (Korinek, 2003: 145). Improvements in productivity are due to the intensification of and inputs to cultivation and to the greater care with which plots are tended. The extent of severe poverty decreased from 70% in the mid-1980s to approximately 33% (World Health Organization [WHO], 2006).

In general, however, Viet Nam remains a poor country, with per capita incomes of U.S.\$690 in 2006 (World Bank, 2007). In rural areas in 2006, however, the average monthly income was only U.S.\$31.62 (approximately \$380 p.a.), and poor rural households have average monthly incomes of only \$12.50 per month (Viet Nam News, 2008). Despite state efforts, industrialisation has not taken place on the Chinese scale. Severe and chronic poverty is especially evident in rural areas (Kabeer & Tran, 2002), and the poorest villages tend to be those in remote rural areas that depend solely on agriculture. Thus it is difficult to constitute a livelihood solely from agriculture, and households try to diversify (Scott, 2003).

Diversification in general, throughout the world, is a strategy to help minimise economic and social risks in a context of great impoverishment (Ellis, 2000). Several writers stress that these have been constant themes among Vietnamese rural informants (Gammeltoft, 1999; Kabeer & Tran, 2002). Household survival often depends upon women's activities, whether as farmers, operators of small enterprises, or wage labourers (Korinek, 2003). Bélanger's Red River Delta study, conducted in 2000 in a village 40 km from Hanoi, gives an indication of livelihood strategies (Bélanger, 2002). All the informants were rice farmers, and the pressure on land was described as "tremendous." Many combine farming with other activities: 20% of men and 8% of women received regular wages locally, as cadres, midwives, teachers, doctors, and so on. All village market stalls were operated by women, and 5% of women worked as traders. One-third of men worked as day labourers, and 40% worked further away, usually in Hanoi as construction workers. Those with no other income sources outside farming, 35%

of the total, constituted the poorest stratum of the village (Bélanger, 2002: 325). Thus diversification in Viet Nam is—as elsewhere—a survival strategy.

An important change is that user fees have been imposed for health care and education, which were formerly free. Fees for health care impact heavily on incomes, especially in peasant households (Bélanger, 2002: 330), and gaps in access to health services have widened in recent years (WHO, 2006). Improvements in health indicators are mainly among the non-poor, and women's per capita expenditure on health is less than men's (WHO, 2006). The market reform period has also meant a contraction in women's representation in higher status employment as teachers, and as administrative and health care workers (Korinek, 2003; Rama, 2002).

The example of educational provision indicates some of the countervailing trends evident with liberalisation. Viet Nam has very high literacy rates, stemming in part from the socialist era as well as from the value accorded to education. Fees for schooling were imposed from the very early 1990s onward and increased rapidly. Households are responsible for over half of primary school fees, 67% for lower secondary, and 72% for upper secondary school; some fee exemptions and reductions are available for inhabitants of remote areas and for ethnic minorities as well as for the severely impoverished (Bélanger & Liu, 2004). Despite the imposition of fees, the gender gap in primary school enrolment had nearly disappeared by the early 21st century, which was a considerable achievement (Bélanger & Liu, 2004). This is mainly due to the diminution of severe poverty with marketisation, as well as to the fact that parents realise that the market economy requires basic skills. In 1998, the cost of a child's primary schooling constituted 31.5% of average non-food budgets; the cost of secondary schooling was largely beyond the reach of the poorest households. Girls' school enrolment was found to be much more responsive to household income than was boys', and the gender gap in school completion was rising among the younger cohort, the first to be affected by user fees (Bélanger & Liu, 2004). In 2006, World Bank country figures indicated that primary school enrolment was 98% for boys but 91% for girls (World Bank, 2007).

Some Gendered Aspects of *Doi Moi* in Rural Areas

For most rural women, decollectivisation means that they spend more time on household-based economic and reproductive activities. Decollectivisation has had mixed effects, as indicated above. In terms of work organisation, women's work has become less visible with the retreat of cooperatives and the work point system; husbands have enhanced authority over wives and children. However, women may have more leeway in how to apportion tasks over a day. Liberalisation, as noted, has also meant that women can take up their traditional niches as market traders, and this is welcome to many.

In general, however, there has been a move for women to be confined, or more confined, to household-based activities with *doi moi*. As noted above, the form and composition of the household has important implications for women's lives. How have relations within households altered?

In the sphere of family law, regulations benefit women. In particular, the 1986 Family Law, drafted by the WU, affirms joint control of household property, joint consent to economic transactions, and equal household domestic responsibility. It also attempts to protect wives from spouses' violence. Although it is highly unlikely that the law is fully enforced in the countryside, it has raised women's legal status.

Although women-headed households should now be able to access land in their own right (see above), rural practice continues to disadvantage women. Divorced women encounter major problems in land access. Divorced women should receive compensation for any loss of land rights, but divorcées are often underpaid, as well as being left landless (Scott, 2003; Tran, 1999). Divorcées have extra problems if they originate from "outside" villages. Unless she remains in her ex-husband's village, a divorcée will lose her use rights (Tran, 1999). Similarly, a married-out woman might have to walk or cycle to her own village daily to work land in order to keep her rights "active" as well as to tend crops (Gammeltoft, 1999). Women are less likely to inherit land than men; and they rarely inherit forest land (Scott, 2003). One of the causes of poverty for female-headed households is disadvantaged access to land (Kabeer & Tran, 2002).

With the partial retreat of the state, there is more reliance on kin networks. The transfer of land between generations has been restored, and the kinship system has been reinforced (Bélanger, 2002), with detrimental results for women. Larger numbers of households are nuclear; nevertheless, decollectivisation has increased the importance of lineages. For instance, there has been an increase in attention paid to weddings and funerals and in their expense (Luong, 2003; Sikor, 2001). The longstanding preference for sons has been strengthened with the importance of lineage rituals. Sons also have economic value in taking care of elderly parents, and this is considered the eldest son's proper duty. In Bélanger's (2002) teams' interviews, fear of illness and ensuing health costs was an important motivation for having at least one son.

A distinctly non-traditional phenomenon, however, is that single women have established their rights to be mothers and to head families (Liljeström et al., 1998). This has perhaps been aided by recognition of the sex imbalance due to war. The established practice is that liaisons are secret; the child takes the mother's name, and the identity of the father is never revealed (Pham, 1999). This can cause hardships but is seen by many, including the Women's Union, as preferable to the strengthening of de facto concubinage (Liljeström et al., 1998). Single mothers have rights to house and land but in practice theirs are among the worst-off among peasant households. They have rights to only one adult land allocation, and they may receive inferior land.

Gammeltoft shows how the gains and losses due to decollectivisation and the dismantling of accompanying welfare systems affect women at an emotional level. Women she interviewed *in the north said that in the past, they had more time to rest and to talk to other people—they were more happy (joyful, vui)* to go to work because everyone worked together (Gammeltoft, 1999: 32). Today, people's work is arranged more autonomously, but work is also more demanding and time consuming. Women's retreat into the household means that they have less contact with others. Because women realise that they may be responsible for the welfare of their family, they are often impelled to work to their limits, sometimes imperilling their health (Gammeltoft, 1999). Women's responsibility for household survival weighs heavily upon them, often affecting their well-being (Gammeltoft, 1999). Some women in Bélanger's study indicated their understanding that women's lives are usually much harder than men's, and "felt sorry" for girl babies for this reason (Bélanger, 2002: 328). Women's lack of time also means that they are less able to attend political events or to improve their skills (Korinek, 2003; Pham, 1999). Today, success or failure is seen as a *personal* responsibility, whereas previously everyone (in the north) was equally poor. New opportunities exist now, but so does greater risk and uncertainty, and this is accompanied by increased stress (Gammeltoft, 1999).

PROSPECTS FOR EMPLOYMENT?

Decollectivisation and market reforms have pushed many rural women back into the home. In the early 1990s, Moghadam (1992) as well as Einhorn (1993) discussed the revival of ideologies of domesticity and women's "place" in eastern Europe and other transition societies. Moghadam argued that these served to legitimise economic reorganisation and mass unemployment. Employment outside the home coupled with housework represented a "double burden" for some. Nevertheless, with loss of employment or work point entitlements and greater encapsulation in the domestic sphere, rural women are likely to find their influence within households reduced.

Rama (2002) and others argue for an optimistic view of market transition, writing that women's loss of employment will be compensated for in future by the growth of export-oriented industry (EOI), which recruits women workers. While this is not the place to explore this topic at length, *two* observations are apposite.

Jenkins' (2006) examination of foreign direct investment and employment in Viet Nam during the liberalisation period found that the employment generated has been limited. Most people are still employed in agriculture and services, and factors such as the crowding out of local firms by foreign affiliates mean that positive employment effects have been reduced. In the Vietnamese case, the claim of creating employment is not to date borne out (Jenkins, 2006).

Second, increasing evidence points not only to poor conditions and low wages in EOI but to increasing informalisation (Pearson, 2007). In the initial years of

export factory growth, there was an assumption that women workers would have remuneration and benefit packages that compared favourably with other occupations (Razavi, 2000), but the scenario that has emerged does not fit this picture. Instead, low wages, excessive working hours, and the absence of security or social protection have become commonplace in east and southeast Asia. Conditions of work for the mainly rural migrant workers bear little resemblance to the ideal of regulation and protection (Pearson, 2007: 204). Thus, if—as seems likely—the percentage of Vietnamese women employed in EOI increases, the future looks uncertain. Luong (2003: 211) reports, ominously, that prostitution, the sex industry and commodification of women's bodies has increased with marketisation.

Market transition as advocated by Nee (1989), Cao and Nee (2000), and others posits that the effects of the market may be differential; the discussion of Vietnamese rural gender relations and transition here bears out this hypothesis. Most people have gained through increased prosperity, and in a situation of food insecurity this factor cannot be dismissed. However, in general, rural women have lost out in comparison with rural/peasant men. In part, this is due to changes such as the imposition of user fees and the loss of formal sector employment—factors that can be encompassed by market transition theory. Market transition theory, however, is too narrowly focussed to yield suggestions for policy that encompass peasant women's working lives. Peasant women's lives lie not only in the formal economy but also within households, lineages, and communities.

This article has argued that a fuller understanding of the situation of women is provided by feminist ethnographic and political economy accounts. Rural women have lost out in the dismantling of the collective economy because peasant households have been reinstated as the primary economic units, constituting a structural basis for women's subordination. Features such as patrilineality or the ancestor cult are not, of course, creations of neo-liberal policy. However, the juxtaposition of the market and peasant household units has allowed lineage practices and son preference to flourish.

The Vietnamese case and others referred to here indicate that decollectivisation and liberalisation often mean widespread female unemployment; the feminisation of subsistence farming, the diversification of livelihood strategies, and the strengthening of traditional gender norms and patterns. In general, women are being pushed back into unremunerated, informal work with increased responsibility for family welfare. This is usually accompanied by the reinstatement of the husband/father as manager of the farm and of wives' labour. Feminist theories are able to elucidate the interlocking nature of households, lineages, and the wider economy. Such an understanding is valuable in seeking to formulate policies that might better the conditions of work and life for peasant women.

The final section of the article considers what types of changes or processes might benefit rural women within decollectivisation and liberalisation schemes. What might make for a more gender-egalitarian land redistribution?

CONCLUSION: WAYS FORWARD

The first and most crucial factor to consider in policy terms is how land has been redistributed. Where land permits or titles are allocated to the “head of household,” then men will benefit at the expense of wives and daughters (Jacobs, 2003, 2006.) Only a minority of women, albeit a growing minority, are considered to be household heads. In many societies, where an adult man is present, he is considered to be the head of household. Thus women, especially wives, must be named on any permits or deeds. Women are in stronger positions where they have their own deeds or titles.

Having claim to some land presents many advantages for women (Agarwal, 2003). Within market conditions, of course, many are likely to lose this land, as will many poor male peasants. However, being named on land permits or titles does put women on a more equal footing with men.

Due to the discrimination women face, however, simply having formal rights will not ensure equity. A series of other measures would have to be enacted and attempted in order to give rural women a measure of security. Those suggested here concern enforcement, representation, and the addressing of other obstacles to women’s ability to use their rights.

Legal changes have to be enforced to be effective: there are many examples of beneficial gender changes “on the books” that remain there. Changes affecting peasantries are particularly difficult to legislate for, as households are often geographically spread. Reforms in favour of peasant women must depend upon state action and state capacity for enforcement, as well as upon willingness to enforce the law.

Second, some form of representation for rural women is needed. In Viet Nam, the quasi-governmental Women’s Union has long had and still has advocacy functions. However, with the disappearance of collective committees and party organisations, even the limited voice these allowed is missing. As in other Soviet-type states, civil society organisations have been discouraged, and so few exist to take their place. In contemporary circumstances, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) sometimes take on functions of representation on an informal basis. Some forum may be better than none, but this is not a wholly satisfactory solution: NGOs are often external, and they are not representative bodies.

Where decollectivisation leads to the consolidation of large farms, trade unions may be able to provide representation through women’s sections or similar organisations, as women may be agricultural workers. However, a great deal of decollectivisation entails restructuring into individual family plots. On these, husbands and fathers retain or regain authority. Wives and daughters are unlikely to have any forum for the discussion of gender issues, since village and family councils are usually dominated by village/lineage elders.

There exists no easy answer to the question of what could be put in place. Labour movements in transition countries are often weak or nonexistent.

However, where they do exist or are forming, they may need to consider how rural women's organisation can be facilitated. The model of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India may be apposite (Rose, 1993). SEWA is a women's labour organisation, and it represents people not normally considered as proletarian.

Effective land rights also need to be backed up by other legal measures. In particular, women seeking to assert land and property rights often face violence from husbands and their relatives, or sometimes from their own (natal) relatives. Violence is the most immediate way of divesting women of any new property rights and of intimidating them so that, even where they keep land, they are not able to exercise its use (Jacobs, 1997). Thus, ensuring securing women's economic rights may entail the enactment and enforcement of laws in "non-economic" realms, in order to take account of the complex circumstances many women face.

A marriage of concerns for bodily integrity and protection from violence with concern for economic rights is needed. In practice, women's movements have often been the "bearers" of the former type of concerns, and other organisations, such as political parties or trade unions, have been involved with the latter. However, some feminist organisations with a labour movement slant have understood the need for "joined-up" strategies in thinking of women's needs and of workplace rights (Hale & Wills, 2007). Rural women have no organic or ready-made means of organising, because their homes and workplaces are the same: creative solutions must be sought.

There is no suggestion here that attempting to organise in rural areas and among peasant-housewives would be a straightforward matter. It is not sufficient, however, simply to note that rural women have lost rights due to decollectivisation and liberalisation. In a globalising age, new ways of envisaging "work," workplaces," and "workers" are needed.

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