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# Women and Land Ownership in Egypt: Continuities, Disruptions, Contradictions

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## Introduction

Asset ownership is important for everyone. Assets are a source of security and resilience against vagaries in the market, natural disasters, illness, disability, old age, job losses and other threats to wellbeing. Assets are also important for socio-economic advancement and social mobility. Assets can be material or pertain to access to services. In this study, we considered owning land, houses, jewelry, livestock and agricultural equipment as assets.

That women are often disadvantaged in access to and control over assets has been demonstrated by research in various world regional contexts, and unequal asset ownership is understood to be an underlying cause of women's social subordination and poverty.<sup>1</sup> At the macro level, a growing literature attests that asset equality is positively correlated with economic growth. Asset inequality, combined with market failures, leads to differential productivity between the asset poor and the asset rich, which creates poverty and inequality traps.<sup>2</sup>

There is very little empirical research on women's ownership of land or non-land assets in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Cheryl Doss, Chiara Kovarik, Amber Peterman, Agnes Quisumbing and Mara Bold<sup>3</sup> found that gender land statistics are available in only 9 of 53 African countries; none were available for MENA countries. Further, only 3 of the 17 studies reviewed in Doss et al.<sup>4</sup> were published in peer-reviewed

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<sup>1</sup> Bina AGARWAL, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Bina AGARWAL, "Gender and land rights revisited: exploring new prospects via the state, family and market" (2003) 3:1-2 *Journal of Agrarian Change* 184; Maria MIES, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Michael CARTER & Frederick ZIMMERMAN, "The Dynamic Cost and Persistence of Asset Inequality in an Agrarian Economy" (2000) 63:2 *Journal of Development Economics* 265; Abhijit BANERJEE & Esther DUFLU, "Inequality and Growth: What Can the Data Say?" (2003) 8:3 *Journal of Economic Growth* 267; Christopher BARRETT & Michael CARTER, *Risk and Asset Management in the Presence of Poverty Traps: Implications for Growth and Social Protection*, SAGA Working Paper (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Cheryl DOSS, Chiara KOVARIK, Amber PETERMAN, Agnes QUISUMBING & Mara BOLD, "Gender inequalities in ownership and control of land in Africa: myth and reality" (2015) 46:3 *Agricultural Economics* 403.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



venues. Although this may be indicative of a lack of studies that meet journals' publication standards, it may also be a result of a lack of sex-disaggregated data of sufficiently good quality to merit analysis and publication in peer-reviewed venues.<sup>5</sup>

The limited data on gender and land ownership in the MENA region (available from the FAO Gender and Land Rights Database) was collected in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Much has changed since then due to land fragmentation, the availability of irrigation and consequent agricultural expansion into desert land. More recent surveys, for example the Demographic and Health Surveys for Egypt in 2014<sup>6</sup> and Jordan in 2012,<sup>7</sup> collect sex-disaggregated data solely on land and housing as they are deemed the most valuable assets. Information on ownership of other assets such as gold, poultry and livestock is never sex-disaggregated and always reported at the household level. Although ownership of such assets at the household level allows for better understanding of regional inequalities related to wealth distribution within a country, it offers no insight into gendered gaps in asset ownership.

The available data on gender and property ownership does not distinguish between ownership and control, nor does it provide any insights into how ownership and control may change over the life cycle of an individual. Studies that specifically explore land rights for women do distinguish between ownership and control and emphasize that one does not necessarily lead to the other.<sup>8</sup> Although it is well known that patterns of asset ownership are different for women and men throughout the world, a focus on asset preference is absent even in such studies. Asset preferences

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND POPULATION [EGYPT], EL-ZANATY AND ASSOCIATES [EGYPT] & ICF INTERNATIONAL, *Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2014* (Cairo, Egypt/Rockville, Maryland, USA: Ministry of Health and Population/ICF International, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS [JORDAN] & ICF INTERNATIONAL, *Jordan Population and Family Health Survey 2012* (Calverton, Maryland, USA: Department of Statistics and ICF International, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> B. AGARWAL, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, *supra* note 1; C. DOSS *et al.*, *supra* note 3; Sarah GAMAGE, Naila KABEER & Yana VAN DER MEULEN RODGERS, "Voice and agency: where are we now?" (2016) 22:1 *Feminist Economics* 1.



have important implications for well-being and agency. While Agarwal<sup>9</sup> argues that women value land over other economic and social goods, Cecile Jackson<sup>10</sup> argues that women value good marital and familial relations over property ownership, and that some women may forego the latter to preserve the former. Jackson<sup>11</sup> does concede that the need to choose one over the other is itself a predicament only women face and one that is an outcome of women's historical marginalization in property ownership. Men can reasonably expect to enjoy both property ownership and good familial relations.

Gendered patterns of expressed asset preference are important to consider for several reasons. For example, since male relatives may play a significant role in shaping women's access to, control over, and ownership of assets, especially land, it is important to understand which assets men assume are important for women and men, with attention paid to cultural and generational context. Similarly, women's perceptions of which assets are important for women and for men to own may play a role in reproducing and maintaining their subordination in asset ownership or control.

This paper seeks to make a timely contribution to the literature on gender and assets by addressing such oversights and blind spots in previous research. We identify the types of assets women and men perceive as beneficial for their wellbeing, and determine if patterns of asset preference, ownership and control coincide with one another through empirical research conducted in Egypt's New and Old Lands. We begin this paper with some background literature on gender and land ownership in the MENA region. This is followed by a description of the case study and the methods used to collect data, study findings and a discussion thereof, and conclusions.

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<sup>9</sup> B. AGARWAL, "Gender and land rights revisited: exploring new prospects via the state, family and market", *supra* note 1.

<sup>10</sup> Cecile JACKSON, "Gender Analysis of Land: Beyond Land Rights for Women?" (2003) 3:4 *Journal of Agrarian Change* 453.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



## I. Gender and Asset Ownership in the MENA Region

At 5 percent, the MENA region appears to have one of the lowest rates of women's land ownership in the world.<sup>12</sup> More recent surveys conducted in Egypt in 2014 reveal an even lower rate (2 percent) of land ownership for women.<sup>13</sup> In 2007, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) described women's access to land in Egypt as "alarmingly low" and "lagging behind." By law, women in Egypt are entitled to inherit only half the natal property as their brothers, though most women do not end up getting even this limited share. Deep-seated cultural norms ensure that in practice brothers control the shares of their sisters, and women's ownership is just notional.<sup>14</sup> Brother-sister relationships are socially and culturally very important in the region.<sup>15</sup> Brothers are expected to take care of their sisters in case of adversities such as deaths of fathers or husbands. Women themselves refrain from claiming their land rights to maintain good relationships with their brothers since they are expected to marry and access land in their husbands' homes.<sup>16</sup> Women's willingness to surrender their share of natal property to their brothers without even being asked to do so has also been noted in South Asia by Srimati Basu<sup>17</sup> and Bipasha Baruah<sup>18</sup> and identified as a mechanism by



<sup>12</sup> FAO Gender and Land Rights Database.

<sup>13</sup> MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND POPULATION [EGYPT], EL-ZANATY AND ASSOCIATES [EGYPT] & ICF INTERNATIONAL, *supra* note 6.

<sup>14</sup> UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA, *Women and Access to Land and Credit: Discussions and Key Findings of the African Gender Development Index in Selected African Countries* (Addis Ababa: UNECA, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer C. OLMSTED, "Gender, aging and the evolving Arab patriarchal contract" (2005) 11:2 *Feminist Economics* 53.

<sup>16</sup> Georg STAUTH, "Women, Properties, and Migration: Access to Land and Local Conflicts in Rural Egypt" (1990) 3 *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* [The Journal of German Middle Eastern Society] 32; Annelies MOORS, *Women, property and Islam: Palestinian experiences* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Dina NAJJAR, *The Money of Qaroon and the Patience of Ayoub: Women and Land in Egypt's Mubarak Resettlement Scheme* (PhD Dissertation, Western University, London, Ont., 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Srimati BASU, *She Comes to Take Her Rights: Indian Women, Property and Propriety* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Bipasha BARUAH, *Women and Property in Urban India* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).



which women maintain affectionate relations with their natal family in general, and with brothers in particular.

As noted previously, there is also very little research on non-land assets owned by women in the MENA region. One exception is research conducted by Moors,<sup>19</sup> which examines the multiple meanings that owning and wearing gold holds for women in Palestine. Moors explains that gold contributes to economic security and provides a means to store wealth while also signifying kinship relations and societal status. In Nablus, women receive most of their gold through marriage, mainly as dowry from their husbands' families, but also from their own families as wedding presents. She describes how women's preferences for different types of gold (Italian, Gulf and *Baladi* (local)) reflect class, status, and claims to modernity.

Based on fieldwork conducted in 2014, 2015, and 2016, this study seeks to understand asset preferences of women and men as well as the gendered distribution of asset ownership (agricultural land, house, livestock, poultry, gold) in the New and Old Lands of Egypt. Additionally, by exploring asset sales and control over expenditure of resulting income, we gain a sense of the patterns of control over these assets. We also try to understand life cycle changes for women and men in the preferences and accumulation of different assets. We analyze our findings vis-à-vis scholarly literature on gender and asset ownership.

## **II. Description of Study Areas and Methodology**

We collected data in two areas in Egypt – the New Lands (represented in our study by the Noubariya settlement) and the Old Lands (represented in our study by the Kafr Sheikh settlement) (Figure 1). The Old and New Lands have common socio-cultural, historical and economic ties but differ significantly where these relate to women's land ownership. While the primary objective of this study was to understand differences in asset preference, ownership and control between men and women in Egypt, conducting fieldwork in both Old and New Lands of Egypt enabled us to also explore and understand how asset preferences and ownership may be influenced by the social, economic and political roles and responsibilities that women and men are accustomed to holding in different contexts.

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<sup>19</sup> Annelies MOORS, "Wearing Gold, Owning Gold: The Multiple Meanings of Gold Jewelry" (2013) 25:1 *Etnofoor, Gold* 79.

The New Lands are desert lands that have been reclaimed and cultivated since the Revolution of 1952 in Lower Egypt and the building of the High Aswan Dam. The Noubariya settlement in the New Lands was only reclaimed in the 1990s by the Mubarak Resettlement Scheme (MRS) implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation.<sup>20</sup> The Old Lands, on the other hand, have been irrigated by the natural overflow of the Nile River and settled for thousands of years.

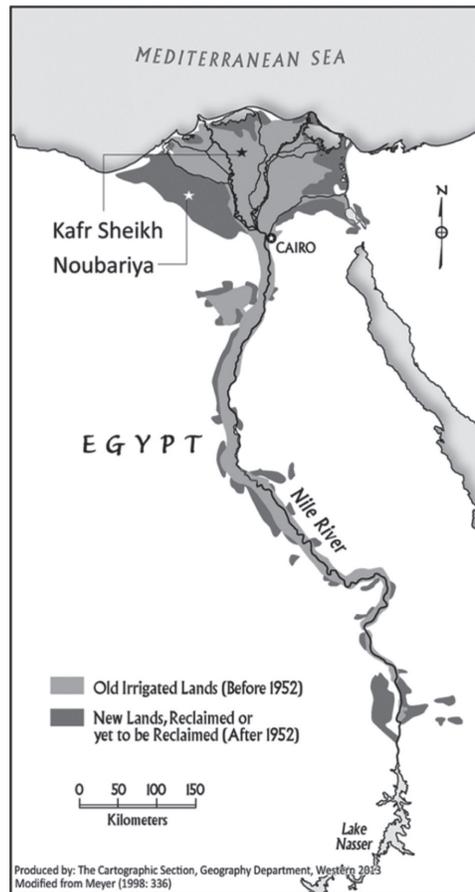


Figure 1: Study Locations in Egypt

<sup>20</sup> Ray BUSH, "Politics, power and poverty: twenty years of agricultural reform and market liberalisation in Egypt" (2007) 28:8 *Third World Quarterly* 1599.

While the Noubariya settlement in the New Lands has a 20 percent land ownership rate for women, the Old Lands (represented in our study by Kafr Sheikh) are known to have a much lower land ownership rate for women of only 2 to 6 percent.<sup>21</sup> The Noubariya settlement was of particular interest to our study because the World Food Program (WFP) provided food aid to settlers in the area on the condition that women receive 20 percent of the distributed land titles. Each distributed parcel of land was either 2.5 or 5 acres. Settlers who held a university degree or diploma were allowed access to 5 acres of land and a homestead in a nearby village. The rationale behind this was that endowing educated unemployed people with land might motivate them to take up farming or to open businesses to support themselves. Other settlers, typically farmers who had been evicted previously from other areas, were given 2.5 acres of land each and a house in nearby villages.

This latter group of settlers had previously been awarded land in other areas in the 1950s when President Nasser introduced land distribution schemes by imposing land ceilings on landowners. President Mubarak, in turn, introduced laws in the 1990s to return some of this land to the original owners.<sup>22</sup> Some of these farmers who had previously been awarded land in the 1950s but evicted in the 1990s were compensated with desert lands in Noubariya.

Plot sizes are smaller in the Old Lands. In Kafr Sheikh, they are on average less than an acre. Consequently, people in Kafr Sheikh tend to farm multiple parcels of land (two or three on average). While farming in Kafr Sheikh is subsistence-oriented with a focus on rice and wheat production, farming in Noubariya is export-oriented and more lucrative, with a focus on fruit production. Nonetheless, livestock and sugar beet plantations may also be lucrative enterprises in Kafr Sheikh.

In addition to requiring that women receive one-fifth of the land titles in the New Lands, the WFP also insisted on the inclusion of women in

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<sup>21</sup> UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, “USAID Country Profile. Property Rights and Resource Governance: Egypt”, online: [https://www.land-links.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/09/USAID\\_Land\\_Tenure\\_Egypt\\_Profile-1.pdf](https://www.land-links.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/09/USAID_Land_Tenure_Egypt_Profile-1.pdf) (2010); FAO Gender and Land Rights Database; MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND POPULATION [EGYPT], EL-ZANATY AND ASSOCIATES [EGYPT] & ICF INTERNATIONAL, *supra* note 6.

<sup>22</sup> R. BUSH, *supra* note 20.



leadership positions on formal land-related committees such as Water User Associations (WUAs) and Local Agricultural Cooperatives (LACs). The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the MRS training program provided formal leadership training to both male and female graduate settlers during the early 1990s. Taken together, these interventions created important and visible roles for women in agriculture in the New Lands. This is quite different from the Old Lands of the Nile Delta (including our study community, Kafr Sheikh) where women are far less likely to own agricultural land, attend training, or to participate in public life, even when they own or manage land.<sup>23</sup>

There tends to be higher demand for agricultural labour in the New Lands since settlers relocated there as nuclear families and obtained relatively large parcels of land. The higher demand for labour – including women’s labour – in the New Lands, combined with the fact that settlers have not known their neighbours for a long time, may have led to less rigid social norms about what men and women can do in agriculture, and less social control over women’s roles and movements in general. Inheritance norms also differed in the two areas. Despite enjoying greater visibility in public institutions, women in the New Lands are less likely to get their inheritance shares than women in the Old Lands (we discuss reasons later in this paper).

Another point of difference between the two areas is that public services were better established in the Old Lands, whereas transportation services, health care centers, and government offices were less well-established in the New Lands. During the early stages of resettlement in the late 1980s, the combined price of 5 acres of land and a house in Noubariya (New Lands) was one-sixth the price of an acre of land in the Old Lands. As our findings will demonstrate, these differences in size of landholdings, land value, profitability of agriculture, availability of public services, varying social norms and land ownership rates for women also affect both men’s and women’s preferences and experiences with assets ownership and control.

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<sup>23</sup> Zeinab EL-TOBSHY, “An Annotated Bibliography on Women and Development in Egypt” in Pnina MOTZAFI-HALLER, ed., *Women in Agriculture in the Middle East* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) 141; Jessica BARNES, “Who is a water user? The politics of gender in Egypt’s water user associations” in Leila M. HARRIS, Jacqueline A. GOLDIN & Christopher SNEDDON, eds., *Contemporary Water Governance in the Global South: Scarcity, Marketization and Participation* (London: Routledge, 2015) 185.



In regard to methodology, we were guided by previous research in designing our study in Egypt. Doss et al.<sup>24</sup> conducted an extensive review of women's land ownership in African countries and encouraged researchers to include male and female land owners, holders, operators, and managers in studies on gender and land. Additionally, they highlight the importance of distinguishing between men's and women's sole ownership and joint ownership, and ideally recommend including both sole and joint owners of land. In their findings, these researchers also emphasize discrepancies between reported, documented, and titled ownership because these distinctions have consequences for selling, bequeathing, or using land as collateral.<sup>25</sup>

Keeping previous research in mind, we included as many different forms of ownership, use, and access as possible in the two study locations (Noubariya and Kafr Sheikh). In both locations, we interviewed men who own land, men who rent land, and women who help their husbands farm. In Noubariya, we also interviewed women who independently own land. In Kafr Sheikh, women did not own land independently, so we interviewed women who manage land (they may also co-own it). Our decision to include women who saw themselves as helpers to their husbands rather than as joint owners is justified by the extensive literature on gender and agriculture that emphasizes the tendency for women to be classified as 'helpers' rather than as *de facto* owners regardless of their contributions. We wanted to explore if this was also valid in the Egyptian context and the implications it has for women's ownership of land. While sole ownership and joint ownership are legally defined through names on a title, we found that people's perceptions of ownership may be legally or socially defined. And, as our findings will demonstrate, men and women often have different perceptions of ownership.

Since the forms of ownership, access, and use are somewhat different in the two communities, we could not ensure exact parallelism in the categories (see Table 1). However, our sample does include every form of ownership, access, and use of agricultural land that exists in both communities. As indicated in Table 1, a survey was administered to a total of 402 respondents (200 men and 202 women) in the Old and New Lands. Findings from a total of 120 interviews (15 interviews for each of the

<sup>24</sup> C. Doss et al., *supra* note 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

8 categories of survey respondents) provided qualitative findings, which were then complemented with survey findings.

Survey Respondents	Noubariya (New Lands)	Kafr Sheikh (Old Lands)
Men who own land	50	50
Men who rent land	50	50
Women who help husbands farms	52	31
Women who own land	50	0
Women who manage land	0	69

**Table 1:** Survey Respondents

The survey questions included the following: what are the most important assets for women and men to own and why? Who owns the land, house, and livestock in your household and who controls these assets? For the purposes of this study, we defined control as the ability to make the decision to sell the asset. The survey also included questions about who makes decisions about land use, particularly those related to the choice of two main crops in Noubariya (fruit trees and wheat) and Kafr Sheikh (rice and wheat). The survey did not include questions about gold ownership and control because we were aware that these are sensitive questions in the MENA context and therefore better explored in interviews. Respondents were also asked in the survey about who was responsible for spending income derived from crop, meat and dairy sales. Both men and women were asked these questions.

Twenty-eight enumerators (fourteen men and fourteen women) were trained to conduct the survey. All enumerators had a master's degree or PhD in social sciences from universities in Egypt and were experienced in conducting surveys. Men interviewed men and women interviewed women. Women were reported to be difficult to recruit because of their heavy productive and reproductive workloads. Women were interviewed in their homes, sometimes while preparing meals. Men were reported to be relatively easier to recruit. Men were often interviewed in the LACs they visited to get fertilizer and seeds.

The survey was administered in all thirteen villages in the Noubariya settlement of the New Lands. An equal number of villages was randomly selected in the Kafr Sheikh settlement of the Old Lands. The individual male and female survey respondents for each category (Table 1) were

selected by agricultural engineers based on official records of land ownership at the LACs. The sample did not include women and men from the same household. The engineers knew who was renting land in the community since they were responsible for distributing fertilizer and other inputs from the LACs to renters. In each of the thirteen villages in Noubariya (New Lands), the engineers were instructed to identify six to eight male respondents, half of whom own land and half of whom rent land. The engineers were simultaneously asked to identify six to eight female respondents in Kafr Sheikh (Old Lands) and in Noubariya, half of whom managed a farm and half of whom helped their husbands farm. Since the engineers made extension visits to individual farms, they knew who the renters, owners and managers were. It turned out that there were no female land owners in some villages in Noubariya. The enumerators were therefore instructed to compensate by including more women landowners from villages that do have higher levels of female land ownership. Many men who are residents of farms in Kafr Sheikh have day jobs on a permanent or temporary (seasonal) basis in other areas but their wives tend to live in Kafr Sheikh. When we arrived to conduct the surveys, we found that these women were active managers of the land that their husbands owned, and we therefore re-categorized them accordingly. Thus, we ended up with more than fifty women managers and fewer helpers in Kafr Sheikh. We were already aware of how imprecise the “helper” and “manager” categories were, and that gendered hierarchies would play a role in how women were identified by themselves and by others.

Our interviews were aimed at understanding in-depth reasons for asset preferences, asset accumulation for men and women over their life cycles, and household decision-making regarding asset use and acquisition. The ease with which assets could be sold for cash, rented, or used as collateral was also explored. Interview participants were identified through snowballing in the three villages where the survey was conducted in Noubariya and three villages in Kafr Sheikh. Survey respondents were asked to identify individuals who fit the categories listed in Table 1. Initial contact with female landowners in Noubariya was made during the PhD fieldwork of one of the authors of this paper. They were also asked to identify respondents that fit into the categories outlined in Table 1.

The engineers and presidents of LACs were a reliable source of information about land ownership and cooperatives, of which landowners were automatically members. In addition to the interviews outlined in Table 1, in each of the 26 villages, one key informant (engineers or presidents of LACs)



was interviewed to better understand the local dynamics of land ownership for women.

Survey data was analyzed in SPSS and interview data was analyzed using theme identification and explanation building. Survey results revealed patterns in asset preferences, ownership, and control, which we have chosen to report in percentage form. The interview data added qualitative depth to survey findings by providing explanations about inheritance, asset use, and life cycle changes in asset preferences and accumulation specific to the two regions.

### III. Findings

In this section, we present findings related to patterns of asset preference, ownership and control based on survey findings as well as underlying reasons for such trends based on survey and interview data. We start with findings about asset preferences and then follow through with findings about actual patterns of asset ownership and control in the two study areas.



#### A. *Perceived Asset Preferences*



Women in Kafr Sheikh (Old Lands) identified gold as the most important asset that women could own, while women in Noubariya (New Lands) identified land as the most important asset that women could own. This difference in preference can probably be attributed to familiarity with land ownership for women in Noubariya. Since there were very few women who own land in Kafr Sheikh, they are less likely to be familiar with the benefits of land ownership for women and more likely to identify an asset (gold) that women are traditionally familiar with and value. Many women who owned land in Noubariya farmed it, bought additional property with the income and paid for their children's weddings. A small number of women in Kafr Sheikh (6 percent of female survey respondents) did identify residential land as a preferred asset for women. In Kafr Sheikh, residential land is much more expensive than agricultural land. On the other hand, most land in Noubariya is agricultural land and fruit tree production is very profitable in this area. This is in sharp contrast to Kafr Sheikh where men often take on day jobs outside the community due to insufficient farming income and small landholdings.



There were notable differences between male and female respondents' perceptions about the most important assets for women to own. Men identified gold as the most important asset for women to own in both communities, though more men in Noubariya (10 percent of male survey respondents versus 7 percent in Kafr Sheikh) identified agricultural land as an important asset for women. Similarly, more men in Noubariya identified houses (12 percent versus 4 percent in Kafr Sheikh) as important assets for women. This can again be attributed to both the visibility and the positive experiences of women owning agricultural land and houses in Noubariya. Men in Noubariya are more familiar with women owning agricultural land and homes than men in Kafr Sheikh.

Both men and women gave similar responses to the underlying reasons for preferences. Gold and clothing were described as a source of beauty and pride for women. Gold was additionally emphasized as a source of security and savings. Women and men explained that women often sell gold in times of financial crisis and then rebuy it when they can.

Houses and land were preferred for their ability to provide security in the event of adversity. Agricultural and residential land were preferred because they created or consolidated sources of income and conferred social status. Homes were identified as useful assets because they could be sold to provide for important life events (such as weddings) or be inherited by children. Some women, in Kafr Sheikh mostly, emphasized a house as the most important asset for women because it enabled them to live separately from their in-laws and not be controlled by them. Fewer married women in Noubariya identified houses as important assets, perhaps because they had moved to the New Lands as nuclear family units rather than as intergenerational extended families, and were therefore not living with in-laws.

Men in both communities considered agricultural land the most important asset for men. More men in Noubariya than in Kafr Sheikh identified private enterprises as valuable assets. This is probably because Noubariya is a newer settlement with more potential for entrepreneurial projects. Access to modern irrigation (drip irrigation and light sprinkler) was only reported as an asset in Noubariya. A small percentage of men in Kafr Sheikh (3 percent) identified residential land as an important asset for men to own; men in Noubariya did not identify it at all. As previously explained, residential land in Kafr Sheikh is an important but rare asset.

Women also agreed that agricultural land was the most important asset for men to own (51 percent in Kafr Shiekh and 56 percent in Noubariya)



albeit not as highly as men did (70 percent and 60 percent respectively). In Kafr Sheikh, vehicles, private enterprises, and livestock were identified as the other most important assets for men to own. In Noubariya, preference for agricultural land was followed by vehicles, private enterprises and houses. Men in Kafr Sheikh supplement their income from farming with other jobs and enterprises. Livestock was deemed an important asset for men and women. The only difference was that men were mostly involved with cattle fattening for meat and women with milk and dairy products. Vehicles were identified as more important in Noubariya than in Kafr Sheikh because the New Lands are far less well-served by public transportation than the Old Lands. Both men and women valued poultry as an asset but for different reasons; men primarily valued poultry for income generation and women for household subsistence and occasional additional income.

The reasons provided by men and women for the most important assets they thought men should own were very similar and predictable: income, security, stability and social status. Vehicles were also valued for transporting crops. Residents of Noubariya further valued their vehicles for visiting their original hometowns, often in the Old Lands. Agricultural machinery was deemed important for optimizing agricultural operations, improving production and for renting out to generate income. Private enterprises such as cellphone sale and repair shops, bakeries, grocery stores and fish farms were identified as important sources of employment and income.

### ***B. Actual Patterns of Asset Ownership, Use and Control***

Although we ensured that we included both male and female landowners in our survey, we were fully aware that many more men than women owned land both in the surveyed households and the communities from which they were drawn. Many men in the New Lands also owned land in the Old Lands as part of their inheritance. Male renters in Kafr Sheikh often also owned small parcels of land (less than one acre) in the same or other communities. We explained in our methodology that although women in Kafr Sheikh (and the Old Lands more generally) rarely owned land, many were *de facto* land managers. Our findings also reveal that per official records in LACs, on average, women in Kafr Sheikh own 8 percent of the land titles while they own 17 percent in Noubariya.

In both the Old Lands of Kafr Sheikh and the New Lands of Noubariya (particularly for land distributed to descendants of formerly evicted



tenants), land is often still titled in the name of the original owner, whose grandchildren or great-grandchildren may now be cultivating it. Four of the thirteen villages surveyed in Noubariya are occupied by former evictees. Either the land is being cultivated by direct descendants of the original owners, or it is being rented from the actual owners or descendants of original owners.

We found that women tend to identify land officially owned solely by themselves as belonging to both themselves and their husbands, but men were less likely to identify their wives as co-owners for land to which they solely held title. Men were much more likely to identify male relatives (a brother, for example) as a co-owner rather than a spouse. These male relatives were often legal co-inheritors of the land they were farming.

A very gendered scenario also presented itself when we asked questions specifically about who controlled land (makes decisions about selling land) instead of just who owned the land. Women tended to control land jointly with their husbands and in some cases even handed over control to their spouses over land that they owned solely. Men were less likely to identify their wives as co-controllers of land to which they solely held title. Men were much more likely to identify a male relative (again often a brother) as a co-controller rather than a spouse.

To put these findings into context, we must specify that there is more collective ownership of land in Kafr Sheikh because land is often inherited by more than one family, often in undivided parcels. In Noubariya, there is less collective ownership; most land is owned by individual families, and in the case of former evicted tenants, by a single extended family. Even in such extended families, often only one person (almost always a man) is appointed by the LACs to control the land even though there may be multiple owners. Our discussions with LAC officials suggested that this was an intentional strategy employed by the government to reduce the problem, or at least the perception of the problem, of land fragmentation in the New Lands.

We also tried to understand who makes decisions about land use. The survey respondents were asked to explain who makes the decisions about which types of rice (in Kafr Sheikh) and tree varieties (in Noubariya) to grow on the land. In both areas, the man of the household was the most frequently reported answer in Noubariya. More women in Kafr Sheikh (48 percent) reported making the decision alone than in Noubariya (19 percent). Also, more women in Kafr Sheikh were involved in joint decision-making about which rice variety to cultivate than in Noubariya. Taken



together, women in Kafr Sheikh had more say about which rice variety to grow than women in Noubariya did about which tree variety to grow. This may be attributable to the fact that rice is a subsistence crop. Since women are responsible for household subsistence, they may have more knowledge about which varieties of rice are more productive and/or palatable, and more control over decisions about growing them. Most families in Kafr Sheikh do produce and sell surplus rice. Women tend to make decisions about selling surplus rice solely or jointly with their spouses.

Wheat is grown in both areas. Most of the decisions about growing wheat were made solely by men in both communities. Fruit trees, which are perennials, are grown more often in Noubariya. Fewer farmers in Noubariya cultivate wheat.

When we looked at control over income earned from crop sales, we found that men had significant control over how to spend income from crops even when their wives were the sole owners of the land. By contrast, none of the men who owned land in Kafr Sheikh and only three out of the fifty men who owned land in Noubariya reported jointly managing the profits of crop production with their wives.

More women in Noubariya owned houses than in Kafr Sheikh (28 percent versus 15 percent, respectively). This is understandable as 25 percent of our overall sample and 50 percent of women in our sample in Noubariya were given houses in their names by the government. Women also owned houses in Kafr Sheikh, since it is more common for women to inherit homes from their parents than to inherit land. However, when asked about control of houses (decisions about selling) the same gendered patterns emerged as with agricultural land and residential land. To illustrate, about half of the women in Noubariya who owned a house attributed control over this house either solely by their husbands or jointly with their husbands. The only difference is that a small number of women who held independent titles to their homes in Noubariya indicated controlling it with a family member (brother, father) rather than a spouse. This may be because women in Noubariya were more likely to be single, widowed or divorced than women in Kafr Sheikh. One divorced woman explained that the land has offered her the opportunity to break free from a troubled marriage: “My husband told me. ‘Pick either me or the land.’ He did not like me to go here and there to get training or to farm the land.” Divorced and widowed women often depend on their brothers and fathers for making major decisions about selling property and finding markets for their goods.



Livestock can be owned and reared by the same individual, or owned by one individual but raised (for meat or milk) by another. Profits are shared between the owner and the person who rears the livestock. Sometimes both parties owned the livestock but the person doing the rearing got more of the profits. More men owned livestock than women in both areas. But almost twice as many women owned livestock in Noubariya than they did in Kafr Sheikh. As mentioned earlier, more women in Noubariya owned land and households were generally better off due to more profitable farming. As such, more disposable income was available to households in Noubariya, as observed by a female newcomer to the settlement: "Women here have more money than women in the Old Lands. I see them when they go shopping or when they participate in rotating credit, there is more cash in the communities here in the New Lands." Also, gender norms tend to be more relaxed regarding asset ownership due to elevated land ownership rates for women in the New Lands communities. "Here in the New Lands, men and women are equal. There are no differences: men received land and a homestead and so did women," was a story repeated by officials and local settlers alike.

For livestock, more women than men reported joint ownership with their spouse, other family members, or friends. Although more men in Kafr Sheikh owned livestock, more women seemed to have independent or joint control over livestock. Livestock is the only asset for which we observed this trend. This is interesting because women also perform significant agricultural labour but are rarely considered landowners if there is a spouse in the picture. There is a much stronger entrenched perception of land as a male asset than livestock.

Far more livestock sales (for meat) were reported in Kafr Sheikh than in Noubariya. Many rear livestock (one cow or buffalo, for example) for household milk and meat needs. In Kafr Sheikh, most of the livestock sales are controlled quite equitably by men and women. In Noubariya, much of the livestock income is controlled jointly by women with spouses or family members.

For similar reasons as meat, more dairy is sold in Kafr Sheikh than in Noubariya. Women almost solely contributed the labour required for milking cows and processing milk. Although milk income is largely controlled by women in both areas, a small number of men do exercise complete control over income from milk sales (13 percent in Kafr Sheikh and 16 percent in Noubariya).



Given their high birth and death rates, we found it impossible to collect quantitative data about poultry ownership in Kafr Sheikh and Noubariya. We did collect data about control over income from poultry sales. Poultry income in Kafr Sheikh was largely controlled by women and by men in Noubariya. This can be due to limited access to markets (resulting from limited transportation in Noubariya) which put men in a better position to market poultry. This may also be attributable to poultry production in Noubariya being carried out on a larger, more commercial scale, which then becomes a male domain.

We were already aware that incomes earned from milk, meat and poultry sales in Noubariya would be lower than in Kafr Sheikh. However, we found that the sale of these items contributed as much as 24 percent of total household incomes in Kafr Sheikh. Although women in Kafr Sheikh assumed that their contributions to household income were simply 'helping' their husbands better support families, and these views about women's contributions were also shared by others in the community, it is obvious from the data that they add up to a significant share (almost a quarter) of total family income.



#### IV. Discussion



There were both compatibilities and incongruities between men's and women's expressed preferences for assets and actual patterns of ownership and control in our study. We discuss the interplay between asset preference, ownership and control in this section, and analyze them in the context of other scholarly literature on gender and asset ownership.

The preferences for asset ownership reported by men and women might reflect "adapted preferences," – people systemically convincing themselves of preferences which suit their predetermined cultural roles.<sup>26</sup> Women and men are socialized to believe that land, agricultural equipment and vehicles, for example, are male assets, and that men should be family breadwinners. Preferences expressed by women for men's ownership of assets and by men for men's ownership of assets appear to reflect these socialized beliefs. Women's preference for livestock and poultry may similarly be a product of social norms that encourage women to take responsibility for household nutritional security and, to a lesser extent, for economic activities that are supportive of – rather than at par with or

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<sup>26</sup> S. GAMMAGE, N. KABEER & Y. VAN DER MEULEN RODGERS, *supra* note 8.



independent of – their husbands’ breadwinning efforts. Thus, in both communities, livestock and poultry rearing operations carried out at commercial scale were always identified as men’s assets whereas smaller subsistence operations were almost always characterized as women’s assets.

Socialized gender roles can also explain why women who owned land handed over control of the land to their husbands. Many male and female landowners in Noubariya as well as LAC officials explained that land ownership for women is a source of spousal conflict. There were several reports that husbands refused to live in homes or cultivate land owned solely by their wives. Some men divorced their wives if they insisted on owning land and houses solely in their names. Ownership titles in the New Lands were offered on the basis that owners live on the land and in their homes. Women who held such titles were often determined to stay to avoid eviction, or resort to selling their property. Men who were supportive of their wives’ property ownership in Noubariya were often “rewarded” or “compensated” later by their wives with additional property (more land, homes and vehicles) purchased from land profits and often titled solely in the name of the man. More men in Noubariya than in Kafr Sheikh believed that land is the best asset for women to own. This is probably because men in Noubariya are more accustomed to women owning land and they may have also benefited financially and socially from women’s land ownership. The informal concessions women must make to individual men and to an established patriarchal order to protect their right to land ownership speaks to the important but ultimately limited role that policy interventions (such as titling land in the name of women) can play in altering gender norms and social hierarchies in the absence of wider political consciousness and awareness-raising about gender equality.<sup>27</sup>

Although women in our study were generally socialized to think of themselves as homemakers primarily and at best as secondary or supplementary breadwinners, they did repeatedly emphasize the importance of land ownership for women. A landowner’s wife in Kafr Sheikh explains: “Land is the best asset; it is always there. When a woman owns livestock or gold, a day will come and she will sell it to resolve some financial crisis her household is facing. Land is best because it will always stay there.” Despite such assertions, we found that women did not protect inheritance rights of their daughters. Women rarely inherited land from their mothers

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; B. BARUAH, *supra* note 18.

in either community. On the rare occasion that women inherited land, their shares were even smaller than the half shares of their brothers that they were legally entitled to. A woman in Kafr Sheikh who was abandoned by her husband explained that she had rented land and worked as a wage laborer to support her son when he was young. It was only when her son had grown up that she gained the courage to ask for her share of natal property. Even though she received less than half the share of her brothers, she was happy because it provided her and her son with a source of sustenance. Women's agency is often strengthened at a later stage in life, as this woman's was, especially if she has adult sons who can also offer support (Najjar<sup>28</sup> reports similar findings in Upper Egypt). This finding, among others, highlights the importance of understanding how and why asset preference may change over a woman's life cycle.

Women were occasionally given cash – often well below the market value of the share they were entitled to, as compensation for giving up their claims to parental property. In Kafr Sheikh, women who inherit property are usually from wealthier families, but even they tend to get less than their rightful share. In Noubariya (and the New Lands, more generally), inheritance issues are complicated further by the fact that the land was quite barren and uncultivable when it was initially distributed. It was perceived to have been made productive through the efforts and exertions of men. This perception – erroneous though it is – further marginalized women's efforts to secure inheritance rights. Even when women get a share of parental property, they receive cash equal to the value of their share when the land was initially settled and uncultivable.

We discovered that the price of land in Noubariya has increased thirty-five times since the area was initially settled. Men often pooled household resources to purchase property in Noubariya, especially in the early stages of the settlement, but the titles were always solely in their names. Married women were rarely able to secure titles in their own names. We encountered only one married woman in Noubariya and another in Kafr Sheikh who had secured land and housing titles in their own names.

We found that most of the land distributed specifically to women in Noubariya had already reverted, or would eventually revert, to sons and not to daughters upon inheritance. This resonates with other researchers' findings<sup>29</sup> that even when women are potentially able to acquire land and

<sup>28</sup> D. NAJJAR, *supra* note 16.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, B. BARUAH, *supra* note 18.

property through either inheritance, purchase in the market, or distribution by the state, they are unwilling or hesitant to assert the equal inheritance rights of sons and daughters. Most women landholders in Noubariya expressed a clear preference for sons as inheritors, employing the entrenched logic that a son would support them in their old age while a daughter would leave the family after marriage. A woman landholder in the New Lands explained “My daughter came to me and demanded her share in the land. I will definitely not give the fruits of my son’s and husband’s labour to her in-laws. I told her ‘Go tell your mother-in-law not to try too hard: no one is taking away the rights of my brother and father.’”

Authors like Manimala,<sup>30</sup> Susie Jacobs<sup>31</sup> and Nitya Rao<sup>32</sup> have also documented how embedded and widespread such attitudes are in other settings in Asia and Africa. For example, in her landmark account of the Bodhgaya movement in India, Manimala<sup>33</sup> documents how land rights for women emerged out of mobilization around several other issues such as domestic violence, alcohol abuse, education, and land distribution to landless men from a large land holding. She writes that the demand for separate titles for women surfaced only when landless men given title to land became drunken and violent, provoking their wives to demand titles in their own names. However, women who received land said that they would leave it to their sons, thus confirming that land ownership would eventually revert to male control. Researchers working in the sub-Saharan African context have also pointed out that the simple targeting of resources to women does not always ensure equitable outcomes since resources may then be allocated in biased ways to children under conditions of strong son preference.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> MANIMALA, “*Zameen Kenkar? Jote Onkar!* Women’s Participation in the Bodhgaya Land Struggle” (1983) 14 *Manushi* 2.

<sup>31</sup> Susie JACOBS, “The Gendered Politics of Land Reform: Three Comparative Studies” in Vicky RANDALL & Georgina WAYLEN, eds., *Gender, Politics and the State* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998) 121.

<sup>32</sup> Nitya RAO, *Standing One’s Ground: Gender, Land and Livelihoods in the Santal Parganas, Jharkand, India* (PhD Dissertation, University of East Anglia, Norwich, U.K., 2002).

<sup>33</sup> MANIMALA, *supra* note 30.

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence HADDAD & John HODDINOTT, “Does Female Income Share Influence Household Expenditure? Evidence from Cote d’Ivoire” (1995) 57:2 *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 77; Muthoni WANYEKI, *Women and Land in Africa:*



In their study of women's perceptions of land ownership in the district of Kutch in Gujarat, India, Gauthami and Meena Rajgor<sup>35</sup> found an apparent contradiction between participants' agreement that no other asset but land could bring them the same sense of self-worth, security, or respect within the village and the women's reluctance to give land to their daughters. In part, this was due to pragmatic concerns about whether daughters who had moved away to marry could farm land they are given. However, it was also due to concerns that in transferring land to their daughters, mothers could place them at risk of reprisals from in-laws who do not share a commitment to transferring land to women. Women who hesitated to endow daughters with land may just be taking the practical step of working with patriarchy in some ways while subverting it in other ways. As an example, in our study in Egypt, women landowners expressed no hesitation in investing significant financial resources into their daughters' education and professional development even though they did not intend to leave them their land or houses.

Our study revealed other less-obvious challenges and limitations related to sale and purchase of land that may have implications for women. Our interviews with landowners revealed that it is difficult to sell land in Kafr Sheikh. Selling ancestral land is considered shameful and therefore something people only resort to in dire economic circumstances. Even if owners in Kafr Sheikh decide to sell land, there are many limitations to doing so. The seller is expected to consult siblings and to also have their agreement about the sale. Neighbours must also be consulted about land sales and be given preference for purchasing land. In Noubariya, on the other hand, the initial stages of settling the land are both easy and cheap – a house and 5 acres of land can be purchased for a very reasonable price of 15,000-32,000 Egyptian pounds (EGP) – about 2,000-4,000 USD at the time of fieldwork in 2015. Some people acquired land in Noubariya but found the living and working conditions of the desert too hostile. They sold their lands to others, often from the Old Lands, at very low prices. Frequent buying and selling of land in Noubariya and improved soil fertility (often because of tree planting) meant that prices for some plots of land did occasionally go up significantly. During the time of our field-

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*Culture, Religious and Realizing Women's Rights* (London and New York: Zed, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Gauthami RAJGOR & Meena RAJGOR, "Women's perceptions of land ownership: a case study from Kutch District, Gujarat, India" (2008) 16:1 *Gender & Development* 41.



work, an acre of agricultural land in Noubariya was reported to have sold for 350,000 EGP (about USD 44,000 in 2015), which is close to the price of an acre of agricultural land in Kafr Sheikh. Our interviews with owners, renters and officials revealed that it was also very difficult to buy land in Kafr Sheikh. Land prices had skyrocketed particularly in areas that received irrigation services. “Land is very expensive. Those who own land probably inherited it from their father,” explained a male landowner in Kafr Sheikh. A woman farmer who rents land emphasized that even the combined total of savings and income from gold and livestock sales would not be enough to enable a farmer to buy land, though it may be enough to finance the construction of a house, if the farmer already owned a plot of land. Doss et al.<sup>36</sup> discuss the challenges that arise in defining ownership when the land cannot be bought or sold, due to laws, social norms or other less-obvious reasons. Such challenges that do not relate directly to ownership and may differ from community to community in the same country, with implications for purchase, sale or disposal of property, tend to either be absent or glossed over in other studies of land ownership. We certainly found them to be relevant and deserving of closer attention in our study.

We found that tensions and incongruities also existed in the ownership of non-land assets. Patterns of livestock ownership seemed to correlate with how dependent the household was on the income generated by livestock. Women in Noubariya were more likely to own livestock than women in Kafr Sheikh, probably because livestock was reared for household consumption in the former community and for sales in the latter. Although more men owned livestock in both communities, women were more often identified as responsible for rearing livestock. Selling a cow or a calf was one of the first strategies used to generate cash to deal with a family crisis or to purchase an item or service. We found that decisions about selling livestock were made both with and without women’s consent. The ease with which livestock could be sold for cash made it one of the most easily liquefiable assets owned by women. The wife of a local landowner in Kafr Sheikh explains, “You can sell your livestock while you are sitting in your house. Merchants come and ask you if you want to sell.”

Women, especially those from more affluent households, get livestock as gifts from their parents after they marry and relocate to their husbands’ homes. They may also get livestock as gifts after giving birth to their first child. Many in-laws in Noubariya were reported to have taken

<sup>36</sup> C. Doss et al., *supra* note 3.



and either sold the livestock given to their daughters-in-law by their parents, or to have kept the proceeds from the sale of milk or meat. A wife of a landowner in Noubariya saved money from her grocery shop and bought livestock. She opted to sharecrop the livestock with farmers outside her household to avoid giving her in-laws control over the income from milk and meat sales. She eventually bought a house with the income from this enterprise.

As with livestock, we found gold, which male respondents in our study identified as the best asset for women to own, to be highly liquefiable and alienable from its owners. One male landowner in Kafr Sheikh told us that his mother's earrings do not stay with her for longer than a week. She is constantly selling or using them as collateral to enable the family to manage various cash flow problems and other crises. Similarly, in Noubariya, the husband of a female landowner told us that his wife had sold and bought back her jewelry dozens of times in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

Much like Palestinian women,<sup>37</sup> Egyptian women acquire most of their gold during marriage. Both the husband's family and sometimes the women's parents provide her with gold during the *Shabka* (engagement) ceremony – usually a bracelet, a ring and a pendant. Girls are often also given gold in their natal homes. When girls are born, their fathers are obliged by tradition to buy gold earrings. If their parents can afford it, girls may also be rewarded with a gold ring when they finish intermediate or secondary school.

In their marital homes, women seldom end up controlling the use and sale of gold given to them by their parents. Their in-laws are socially entitled to use and sell it. In the first few years after marriage, women are often unwilling to give away their gold but when children are born and time passes, the in-laws and even husbands may ask for their gold and they are more likely to say yes. Many young and middle-aged women, mostly wives of men who owned or rented land, expressed anger and frustration about the gold that had been taken away by parents-in-law years ago, and never returned: "They told me 'we will return it when the apple harvest is sold.' The apple harvest was sold and I did not get the gold. Then they told me 'we will return it once we marry off our son.' They married off their son and I still did not get my gold back." Since gold is much more expensive

<sup>37</sup> A. MOORS, *supra* note 19.



now than it was a few decades ago (in the 1970s, for example), jewelry is often loaned for the bride to wear and returned to the jeweler after the ceremony. Given such changes, its future use and value as an asset for women is difficult to predict.

Although most study participants considered the appropriation of women's gold by in-laws to be inappropriate at best and an outright abuse of power at worst, a few interviewees opined that borrowing gold from daughters-in-laws was simply a strategy people used to ensure the financial stability and security of the household. They explained that parents-in-law did often try to return gold to their daughters-in-law, and being able to contribute to financial security and asset consolidation elevated rather than diminished a daughter-in-law's social status in her marital home. We encountered one instance during our fieldwork of gold being returned to daughters-in-law by their mother-in-law, who had used the gold to buy land in Noubariya years ago. She returned gold to all three of her daughters-in-law, but because the mother-in-law had taken gold from the oldest daughter-in-law first, she paid her back with interest by giving her two additional grams of gold.

## **Conclusions**

If threats to a family's wellbeing and security are external to the household, it may be less important whether a woman has independent ownership of and control over an asset – be it land, houses, livestock or jewelry. The entire household may be protected if someone within it owns and controls the asset. However, a very different scenario may present itself upon internal threats to family security such as death, divorce, separation or abandonment. In the latter scenario, a woman's wellbeing is likely to depend much more significantly on whether she could exercise ownership and control over assets. One divorcee in Noubariya worked in the wage sector alongside her husband and generated enough cash to purchase seven acres of land in the initial stages of settlement in the New Lands, when land was very inexpensive. She was left with no assets after the divorce and forced to re-enter wage work in her late forties. Our findings point to land and homes as the most economically and socially valuable assets for both men and women. Livestock and gold are also certainly useful assets for women, especially because they can be sold easily for cash. Because these latter assets are highly liquefiable, it is important for women to have control over their sale and use. Therefore, our findings highlight the importance of implementing specific policies to enable and



optimize property ownership by women even if they own other non-land assets such as gold, poultry and livestock.

Determining whether women were as disadvantaged in land ownership as described in the literature on the topic was never one of the objectives of this study. Our findings, though, are different enough from what is reported in the literature to warrant comment in this concluding section. The scholarly and practitioner literature on gender and property suggests that women in the MENA region are drastically marginalized in land ownership. Our empirical findings based on research in the New Lands and Old Lands of Egypt suggest that women may not be as severely disadvantaged in land ownership as generally assumed. Since women were targeted specifically for land distribution in the New Lands, it is not surprising that land ownership rates for women were much higher than the reported average in Egypt and the MENA region. We were surprised, though, to discover from LAC records that 8 percent of women in Kafr Sheikh own land. This is almost twice the land ownership rate for women in the Old Lands (of which Kafr Sheikh is a part) reported in the literature of development organizations such as FAO and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Our findings may support the suggestion made by other researchers such as Doss et al.<sup>38</sup> that women's marginalization in land ownership may be exaggerated – often for purposes of political advocacy – in the development literature. Our findings resonate with others who emphasize that many frequently cited statements about women's land ownership are often oversimplifications unsubstantiated by any available data. Yet, we found, as Doss et al.<sup>39</sup> did, that the broader pattern that women own less land than men, regardless of how ownership is conceptualized, is remarkably consistent. We urge future research on gender and asset ownership to consider various forms of sole and joint ownership (with, for example spouses, family members and friends) through which women and men may own and control assets. We simultaneously encourage researchers to be cognizant that joint ownership does not necessarily imply equal ownership.<sup>40</sup>



<sup>38</sup> C. DOSS *et al.*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Cheryl DOSS, Ruth MEINZEN-DICK & Allan BOMUHANGI, “Who owns the land? Perspectives from rural Ugandans and implications for large-scale land acquisitions” (2014) 20:1 *Feminist Economics* 76; Krista JACOBS & Aslihan KES, “The Ambiguity



More generally, our findings urge us to caution against the dramatization of women's marginalization in land ownership, and encourages more empirical and nuanced inquiries into women's ownership and control over land in different world regional contexts. In addition to enabling women to access and own land, it is important to strengthen and validate women's roles in agriculture. This is critical since women often saw themselves and were seen by others in the community as helpers rather than farmers, despite their often significant role in household earnings.

We were certainly not surprised to discover that women were generally disadvantaged in land ownership in the New and Old Lands in Egypt. However, we also found that large numbers of men did not have any form of title or deed to the land they occupied because it was still titled in the name of the original owner, whose grandchildren or great-grandchildren may now be cultivating it. This draws attention to the observations made by other authors such as Barbara Cooper<sup>41</sup> and Jackson<sup>42</sup> that many men may also have precarious, contingent and anxious relations with land, but this does not become apparent if we lump all men together as the inevitable beneficiaries of patrilineal inheritance. It can also mean that the weak position of women in land ownership may not always be an outcome of the desire to subjugate women but may well be a consequence of competition between different groups of men or of the inability of certain groups of men to acquire control over land. Women's marginalization in land ownership may at least partially also be a consequence of weak asset rights for everyone.

Declining shares of parental property in favor of brothers represents less a mindless subscription to traditional gender ideologies and more an intricate negotiation of kinship that alienates women from natal property, while ensuring economic and emotional support from brothers in times of crisis.

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of Joint Asset Ownership: Cautionary Tales from Uganda and South Africa" (2015) 21:3 *Feminist Economics* 23.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara COOPER, *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society 1900-1989* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> C. JACKSON, *supra* note 10.



*Accès à la Terre*

Like the findings of several others,<sup>43</sup> our research in the New and Old Lands of Egypt endorses the view that legal literacy and consciousness-raising initiatives are as crucial as policy reforms and state actions that protect women's interests and facilitate their agency. Such initiatives, which increase awareness among women as well as men about the benefits of greater equity and address fears about undoing customary male privileges, can help accomplish gender equity goals that are only partially fulfilled through legal measures and economic interventions, regardless of how well-intentioned and progressive they may be.



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<sup>43</sup> Archana PARASHER, *Women and Family Law in India: Uniform Civil Code and Gender Equality* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992); B. AGARWAL, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, *supra* note 1; S. BASU, *supra* note 17; B. BARUAH, *supra* note 18.

