Agrarian extractivism and land struggles in Guayas province, Ecuador: A Feminist Political Ecology analysis

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Abstract

Consistent with the constitutional principle of *Buen Vivir*, the Ecuadorian state implemented the redistributive program *Plan Tierras* in October 2009. *Plan Tierras* promoted the creation of relatively more gender-equal peasant associations through which beneficiaries also became linked to PAIS Alliance's new extractivist development approach. This thesis provides a gender-based study on how the social, economic and ecological transformations triggered by the PAIS Alliance agricultural model enters into conflict with the rights of peasants to maintain their land and live in a healthy environment. I focus on peasant associations that bought the seized rural estates, *Hacienda La Indiana* and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* in Guayas province to become sugar cane and rice producers, respectively. The primary methods used were semi-structured interviews with seventy-one research participants, as well as observing participation complemented by literature review, three focus groups, and six follow-up online interviews. This research points to the paradox of a distributive land policy and associative model linked to an extractivist agricultural model. I found that peasant associations are put into oppressive relations with agrarian elites that control the agricultural markets through ever-lower prices for agricultural products and increasing dependency on technological inputs, equipment, and machinery whose prices have been steadily increasing. My findings highlight the differentiated suffering experienced by women as they bear the hidden physical and emotional burden due to the intersection of the oppressive capitalist system and the continuation of hierarchical gendered roles of women in agriculture. Furthermore, I draw out the link between a crisis of social reproduction and the devaluation of the environmental health of the land as relates to the emotional wellbeing of women who sustain social reproduction. Finally, I found that the historic politics of pervasive patronage, along with corruption and violence, hinders women's on-the-ground food sovereignty practices and peasant autonomous mobilization that would be needed to challenge the extractivist rural development approach of the state. Based on these findings, I conclude that the PAIS Alliance programme has reproduced hierarchic ethics relations in the region with the greatest beneficiaries of this new extractivist dynamic in Guayas province being white-*mestizos* agrarian elites.

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To my feminine lineage

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List of Acronyms

ESPAC	Encuesta de Superficie y Producción Agropecuaria Contínua
CLOC/La Vía Campesina	Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations
FEI	Confederation of People and Indigenous and Peasant Organizations of Ecuador
FENACLE	National Federation of Agro-industry Workers, Peasants, and Indigenous Peoples
FPE	Feminist Political Ecology
INDA	National Institute for Agrarian Development
INEC	National Institute of Statistics and the Census
MAG (former MAGAP)	Ministry of Agriculture
MIPRO	Ministry for Industry and Productivity
PAIS Alliance	Patria Altiva I Soberana
PRONACA	Food Processing National Company
SENPLADES	National Secretary of Planning and Development
SEPS	Supervisory Office of the Popular and Solidarity Economy
SSTRA	Sub-secretariat of Land and Agrarian Reform
UGEDEP	Management and Implementation Unit

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Context

> "Just as the development of capitalist production, the development of twenty first century socialism requires —on a mandatory base— its own primary sin (primitive accumulation), that we can call the primitive accumulation of socialism" (Marx-Carrasco 2014)

Extractivism refers to the historic mode of capital accumulation pursued first by European colonial centers, and nowadays by globalized capital powers, which enables allow the exploitation of natural resource-endowed territories, causing national economic disparities, destruction of nature, and dispossession of peoples' livelihoods (Acosta 2013; Girvan 2014; Svampa 2018). For Svampa (2018), the history of extractivism in the Latin American region since conquest has not been linear; rather, it has been marked by successive economic cycles, dependent on the logic of capital and the world market, and the consolidation of the nation state through extraordinary revenues based on oil and mining during the middle of the twentieth century. As many scholars have argued (Gudynas 2009; Arsel, Hogenboom, and Pellegrini 2016; Svampa 2018), recent increases in the worldwide prices of primary tradable products, known as the commodity boom (2003-2012), were triggered by the rapid economic growth of China and gave momentum to a new wave of extractivism. According to Svampa (2018), in Latin America this translated into new projects of open-pit mega-mining, expansion of the oil frontier, the construction of large hydroelectric dams and other infrastructure (e.g. highways, waterways, ports, and bi-oceanic corridors), and large-scale industrial forestry and fishing. It also included the extension of agricultural commodities, most importantly, soy, oil palm, and sugar cane. The latter are known as flex-crops, i.e., crops that can be used in multiple ways, not only for food but also for the production of agro-fuels, animal feed, and other industrial applications (Borras et al. 2012).

This new wave of extractivism overlapped with the appearance of progressive governments in some countries of the Latin American region committed to constructing a

twenty first century socialism.[1] In Ecuador, PAIS[2] Alliance, the self-described left-wing political party (2006/2007-2021) under the lead of Rafael Correa, recognized the need to replace the historic primary-export and natural resource-based economic model that under neoliberalism managed to exacerbate poverty to scandalous levels for the majority of the population. PAIS Alliance proposed a different extractivist-based project of capital accumulation that, in marked contrast to the neoliberal logic, assigned active participation to the state in articulating investments with the principles of solidarity, responsibility and social inclusion (Marx-Carrasco 2014). Thus, the successive governments of PAIS Alliance advanced the transformation of the productive matrix[3] from 2013 onwards that aimed at changing the development model towards diversified and greater added-value production, generation of new knowledge and abilities as well as eco-efficiency technology (SENPLADES 2012). One important pillar of the extractivist project was the promotion of agro-fuels (Ospina 2013) to reduce the import of gasoline and carbon emissions while promoting public-private partnerships and inclusion of small-scale producers. The abundant revenues derived from the high prices of oil, Ecuador's main export product, meant budgetary flexibility to foster the productive matrix transformation while ensuring extractive rent distribution for the construction of *Buen Vivir* (translated as Living Well).

Since the approval of the new constitution in 2008, *Buen Vivir* became the guiding principle for the Ecuadorian state. Inspired in the life philosophy of Indigenous people, *Buen Vivir* created the possibility to construct a new development paradigm based on the fulfillment of a set of social, economic, and environmental rights (Acosta 2008). As part of the *Buen Vivir* policy, for instance, Ecuador endorsed food sovereignty

[1] However, Svampa (2018) describes the turn of all Latin American governments, regardless of their political ideology, to a "commodity consensus" that led to 'reprimarisation' or a process of refocusing the economy on the production of primary commodities, mostly oriented to export.

[2] PAIS is the Spanish acronym of *Patria Altiva I Soberana* that means Proud and Sovereign Fatherland.

[3] According to the National Secretary of Planning and Development (SENPLADES 2012), the productive matrix is referred to as the way in which the society is organized to produce specific products and services. It is not limited to the technical or economic processes but to the set of interactions between different social actors and available resources that organize productive activities.

as a constitutional goal setting the foundations to advance toward a food system that recognizes the role of peasants, especially women, in the production of food, as well as the importance of cultural diversity and equitable distribution of land and other productive resources. However, *Buen Vivir* as an operational proposal drew heavily on a paradigm of human development that emphasizes individualism along with state authority hindering "the possibility of 'thinking with' other philosophies, cosmovisions, and collective relational modes of life" (Walsh 2010, 20). *Buen Vivir* was not only criticized for the emphasis given to dominant epistemologies of the western modern world but also for the centrality given to gender equality reducing feminist demands into its liberal currents and omitting its more transformative proposals (Varea and Zaragocín 2017). For Walsh, the proposal of *Buen Vivir* ultimately failed to address the real problem of Ecuador "that rests in the legacies, reproductions, and reconstructions of coloniality and of the modern-colonial-world system" (2010, 20). This had an enormous impact on the PAIS Alliance's set of public policies and programs implemented under the guise of food sovereignty, such as *Plan Tierras.*[4]

The redistributive agrarian program of Ecuador's post-neoliberal era, *Plan Tierras,* was implemented in October 2009 to promote access to land for the most vulnerable sectors of the rural population, including women heads of families.[5] According to the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (2010), *Plan Tierras* was designed to distribute approximately 2.5 million hectares that would create access to land to ensure food sovereignty. Indeed, PAIS Alliance promised an integral land policy that would not only distribute land but also provide peasants with the necessary technical and legal assistance to access credit to buy land and to produce associatively[6] (SENPLADES 2010). *Plan Tierras* promoted the creation of relatively more gender-equal peasant associations that linked beneficiaries of the land policy to the government's new

[4] The full name was *"Plan de Fomento del acceso a tierras de los productores familiares*". *Plan Tierras* was replaced in 2014 by the project "*Acceso a tierras de los productores familiares y legalización masiva en el territorio ecuatoriano*".

[5] This included peasants without or little land*,* with priority consideration for young people, female heads of households, beneficiaries of the social program for poorest households (*Bono de Desarrollo Humano*), and Indigenous People.

[6] This organizational system is a form of partnership that allows small-scale producers to pool together resources and work for a common interest.

extractivist development approach. Certainly, this redistributive policy aimed at achieving food sovereignty and gender equality raised high expectations especially for those who have historically been excluded from agricultural development during the past neoliberal capitalist decades. Nevertheless, such a policy also raised doubts about the extent to which this constitutional goal would be met through the inclusion of peasants in an agrarian extractivist model. This is because this model has historically been based on propositions that are in tension with those of food sovereignty.

The province of Guayas, located on the southwest coast of Ecuador, is a particular interesting region for understanding the historical context under which the current agrarian extractivism project under the framework of *Buen Vivir* unfolds. Historically, Guayas has been one of the most important provinces for Ecuador's capitalist development and the center of the country´s agricultural export economy-related financial, commercial, and landed elite, hereinafter the agrarian elite. Various scholars analysed the sequence of export booms during the twentieth century in this region (Guerrero 1978; Chiriboga 1980; A. Guerrero 1980; Fisher 1983; North 1985; Larrea and North 1997; Larrea 2006; Maiguashca 2012). Those booms, they document, involved a very high degree of land concentration, soil degradation and environmental destruction, and high levels of violence that were associated with the consolidation of the political-economic dominance of the agrarian elite.[7] As a consequence, Guayas today has the highest concentration of agricultural land among the 20 provinces of the country, with a GINI coefficient of land distribution[8] of 0.836 (Table 2 Alvarado and Vandecandelaere 2011, 59). Only 6% of large-scale producers, commonly related to agrarian elites-owned corporations, concentrate 70% of the cultivated land in the province (National Agricultural Census of 2001), mainly for large-scale plantations such as sugar cane, bananas, and oil palm (INEC 2019). For example, the production of sugar cane is

[7] Ecuadoreans refer to the "creole oligarchy" (*la oligarquía criolla*) to point out the political power exercised by the local agrarian elite.

[8] Here, the GINI coefficient measures the degree of land concentration. The indicator is 0 when the land is not concentrated or when the land is distributed in an equitable way among the number of existing landowners. The increase of the indicator indicates a higher degree of land concentration. The indicator is 1 when all land is owned by a single enterprise.

concentrated in the hands of the three most prominent sugar cane mills that are responsible for extreme levels of land concentration in municipalities where they are based (Martínez 2012, 2014).[9]

It is to these agrarian elites and related agribusiness that most public resources have been channelled during the second half of the twentieth century (Larrea and North 1997; Larrea 2006; Carrión and Herrera 2012; Ospina, Hollenstein, and Latorre 2020). When examining the annual activities report of the Ministry of Agriculture (2020) in Guayas, it is clear that this trend continued even under the PAIS Alliance introduced its discourse of food sovereignty. For instance, in 2019, the MAG in Guayas directed 65% of its budget for programs and projects that reportedly prioritized peasant agriculture. However, these activities involved access to technological packages or infrastructure, such as storage centers, controlled by elite agribusiness. Resources allocated for agri-food systems that would support peasant food production, including alternative commercialization channels, such as road side stalls or open markets in urban areas[10], or peasant family farmer certification, were insignificant. Nor were women mentioned as potential beneficiaries of any programs. Also, public credit for production in Guayas was principally directed to cash crops, mainly for domestic agro-industrial purposes or the international markets linked to agrarian elites, but not to those food crops for domestic market and family consumption. Moreover, in 2018 only 4.2% of producers received funding from the public banks, *BanEcuador* (formerly known as the *Banco Nacional de Fomento*) and the *Corporación Financiera Nacional* (INEC 2020) for their productive activities.

Given the extent of historic land and productive resource concentration, the implementation of the distributive policy of *Plan Tierras* in 2009 was of special relevance for many in Guayas province. However, as Table 1 shows, within ten years of

[9] For example, the locality of Marcelino Maridueñas, where the sugar cane mill San Carlos operates, only 22 landholders concentrate 72% of the land (Martínez 2012, 2014).

[10] Merchants in such markets do not pay taxes, a source of contention with governments; the markets in urban centers may involve payment to the owner of the space, and the operator of the stall may sell manufactured goods as well as fresh produce and grains.

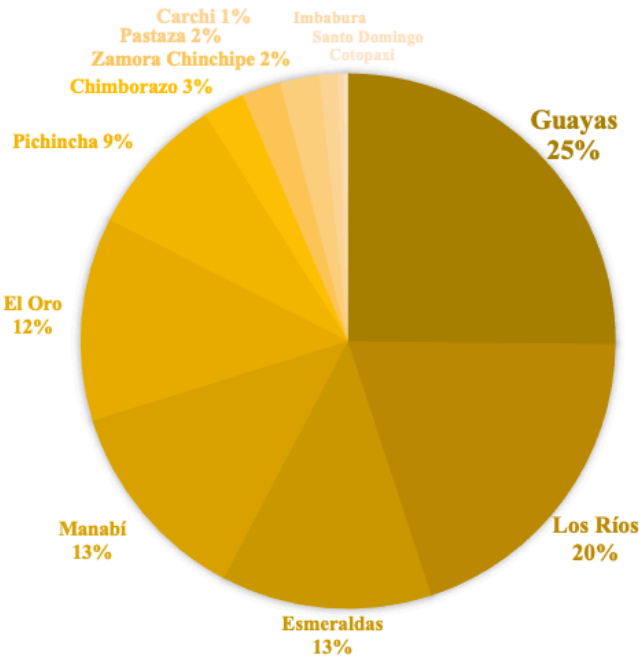
the inauguration of this policy only 6,174 hectares of public land were provided to the benefit of 2,805 landless peasants in Guayas. Beyond reflecting the meagre scope of this public land policy, compared to its initial distributive goals, these data provide more important information in this particular area. Figure 1 clearly shows that while Guayas was the province where most of the public land was distributed to peasant associations, i.e. 25% of the total amount of distributed land to associations, it is also the province where 40% of the available public land could not be distributed in over a decade. This suggests that despite the favorable political and legal context of *Buen Vivir* and food sovereignty, the agrarian elites managed to maintain the historic patterns of asset concentration and inequality that are characteristic of Guayas. This further deepens doubts about the actual scope and implications of a land policy linked to the current project of agrarian extractivism.

Table 1. 1 *Plan Tierras* land distribution and benefited associations (2009-2020)

Description	**National**	**Guayas**	**%**
Hectares of titled ancestral Territories	485.722	18.172	4
Hectares of public land distributed to associations	**24.531**	**6.174**	**25**
Total Hectares	**509.980**	**24.346**	**5**
Indigenous peoples, nationalities, communes and communities	17.319	1.599	9
Peasant associations	**5.425**	**1.206**	**22**
Total Beneficiaries	**22.744**	**2.805**	**12**
Hectares of available public land	**5.870**	**2.329**	**40**

Author's elaboration based on communications with *Plan Tierras*, January 11th, 2021 and May 20th, 2021.

Figure 1. 1 *Plan Tierras* distribution of land per province



Author's elaboration based on communication with *Plan Tierras*, May 20th, 2021.

1.2 Research problem, goals, and focal questions

This research analyses the promised benefits for peasants, especially women who, after having historically been excluded from the state, were integrated into the PAIS Alliance new rural development approach by accessing land through *Plan Tierras.* This research focuses on three main issues prompted by the implementation of a new agrarian extractivist dynamic as an allegedly sustainable and social-inclusive path to rural development and food sovereignty in coastal Ecuador, Guayas province in particular. *First*, the integration into an agriculture model controlled by agrarian elites can potentially generate very different conflicting scenarios for peasant associations that benefited from *Plan Tierras*. *Second*, this extractive-based rural development approach can have negative and gender-differentiated effects on rural peoples' rights to access and control resources, especially land, and to a healthy environment. *Third,* while promoted as a sustainable and social-inclusive rural development policy in support of landless population and food sovereignty, this new extractive agrarian model can set the

conditions leading to a broader process of land concentration, displacing peasants from their land in the long-term. This thesis provides an in-depth empirically researched and gender-based study on how the process of social, economic and ecological transformation triggered by the current extractivist agricultural model enters into conflict with the rights of peasants, and women in particular, to maintain their land and live in a healthy environment.

The goal of this doctoral research is to provide a comprehensive overview on the characteristics of the new agricultural development in Guayas province, and gender-differentiated social, economic and environmental implications as a result of peasant associations' involvement in these extractive dynamics. Moreover, this research offers evidence-based analysis on the extent to which a more gender-equitable access to land through *Plan Tierras* provides peasant associations with the conditions to challenge adverse effects of this new agrarian extractivist development policy in Ecuador. More specifically, my doctoral research addressed the following research questions, that will be discussed throughout the main chapters of empirical research results of this manuscript:

1. What are the new features of the current agrarian extractivist process in agriculture, and how is it redefining access to and control of land and other resources and a healthy environment of peasant associations in Guayas province?
2. What are the fundamental gender-differentiated changes within peasant associations generated by their access to land through the public policy *Plan Tierras* and their involvement in the production of sugar cane and rice, respectively?
3. How has a more gender-equal and social-inclusive approach affected women's emancipatory potential and autonomous peasant mobilization for food sovereignty to challenge possible conflicting scenarios related to the extractive agricultural model?

The rest of this introductory chapter turns to the literature that informed my research and theoretical framing. Following that, I provide an overview of the methodology that guided my data collection and a more detailed description on how I have organized this manuscript.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The new wave of extractivism triggered by the commodity boom of 2003-2012 inspired scholarly interest in studying how the new characteristics and dimensions of this dynamic affected agriculture and those involved in food production. A first approximation derived from the analyses of Gudynas (2010) when he referred to Argentine soy production expansion triggered by external market demand. He describes massive geographical expansion and increasing production of capital- and input-intensive transgenic soy destined exclusively for export, with limited or no processing, few possibilities for capturing the soy export surplus, and scant opportunities for employment generation. Along the same lines, McKay (2017) presented an initial characterization[11] of a new agrarian extractivism based on the soy expansion promoted by a progressive government in Bolivia. However, a more recent work led by McKay, Alonso-Fradejas and Ezquerro-Cañete (2021) problematizes the centrality placed on flex crops volume export and lack of processing and industrialization of agricultural commodities to analyse the predatory extractive nature of the current and dominant agricultural model. Instead, the authors propose to analyse the new extractivist dynamic in a broader sense, as they affirm, that

> "extractivism encompasses particular exploitative social relations combined with unequal ecological and economic exchange. It is therefore important to consider both the social relations of production (the commodification of human nature) and the predatory and exploitative relation of extractive capital to the wealth of natural resources that constitute the common heritage of Planet Earth" (2021, 7).

Drawing on McKay, Alonso-Fradejas and Ezquerro-Cañete (2021), my research aims to understand the extractive character and the gender-ecological implications of the current model of capitalist agriculture that is capital-intensive and highly dependent on external inputs, while at the same time dependent on the exploitation and oppression of labour, including the productive and reproductive work of women, and the destruction of the

[11] This characterization included: 1) massive land concentration and large volumes of raw materials exported with little or no processing; 2) value chain concentration and surplus value appropriation by a few domestic and transnational companies; 3) degradation of the environment due to unsustainable farming practices; and 4) deterioration of work opportunities and conditions for small-scale farmers (McKay 2017).

natural basis of human reproduction. My overarching analytical approach to agrarian extractivism in Guayas province is Feminist Political Ecology (FPE).

The FPE approach was first introduced by Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari (1996) amidst the rise of multiple schools of thought that dealt with feminist and gender responses and alternatives to environmental concerns, the most influential being ecofeminism, feminist science studies, and broader feminist critiques of development (Sundberg 2017). FPE appeared in the late 1990s as a complement to political ecology, and it challenged the narrow scope of environmentalist approaches that neglected the economic and political power relations that govern the distribution and control of natural resources. Among other conceptual contributions, FPE situates itself within the constructivist approaches of political ecology that seek to overcome the separation between humans and nature (Biersack 2006). It centers on how global processes of economic and ecological change affect local social and environment contexts in light of the unequal gender relations that, in interaction with other forms of social difference, shape gender-differentiated experiences, knowledge, and struggles for sustainable development (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996). Since FPE's emergence, the approach has taken a decolonial path, through which positioning are situated, knowledge produced in the marginalized world is reappraised, and multiple feminist theories, understandings, and practices are exchanged in a rhizomatic way (Hawkins and Ojeda 2011; Harcourt and Nelson 2015; Rocheleau 2015).

FPE initially centred research on three areas of analysis: the gendering of resources and environmental rights and responsibilities; the gendering of environmental politics and grassroots activism; and the convergence of gender, science and environment in the academy, politics, everyday life and social movements (Rocheleau et al., 1996). In an attempt to advance a theoretical contribution to FPE to better understand gendered social-economic and environmental dynamics of agrarian extractivism, the following subsections situate some ontological and epistemological insights of feminisms under three interlinked areas of study that I find most relevant, namely: 1/ Land and social reproduction; 2/ Nature and the care work of food, and 3/ Resistance against oppression.

1.3.1 Land and social reproduction

First, my research is inspired by Marxist economic feminists (Fraser 2016; Bhattacharya 2017; Federici 2004) who look into the hidden non-economic realms and the oppressive nature of capitalist social relations of production. Building on Marx's effort to find the "hidden abode" (1976, 279) of capitalist production, Fraser refers to the exploitation of labour power as the "dirty secret" (2014, 60) of capitalist accumulation. As she clearly explains: "capital expands, not via the exchange of equivalents, as the market perspective suggests, but precisely through its opposite: via the non-compensation of a portion of workers' labour-time" (2014, 61). Moreover, the author emphasizes Marx's second analytical step that reveals "an even dirtier secret: behind the sublimated coercion of wage labour lie overt violence and outright theft" (Fraser 2014, 61). Indeed, Marx's labour theory explains that exploitation and coercion lie in the increase and subsequent appropriation of surplus value, i.e. additional value produced by labour beyond the value necessary for their own reproduction (Bhattacharya 2017). However, Fraser (2016) argues, these findings require another step to abodes that are even more hidden, to which she refers as the background conditions of possibility for exploitation and oppression.

Indeed, Marxist feminist scholars and feminist movements have long referred to the ambiguity in Marx's account on the reproduction of labour power, whose activities have been historically assigned to women, and whose economic value and contribution in production have been ignored (Federici 2012; Vogel 2014; Bhattacharya 2017). Much of this work deals with the importance in understanding social reproduction as the basis for male dominance and female oppression in the capitalist system (Vogel 2014). In broader terms, social reproduction refers to the "sociocultural processes that supply the solidary relations, affective dispositions and value horizons that underpin social cooperation, while also furnishing the appropriately socialized and skilled human beings who constitute 'labour' " (Fraser 2014, 71). Despite the role of state and markets in ensuring such processes (Dickinson and Russsell 1985), the current global capitalist regime has placed all the burden of social reproduction on families and communities as corporate and public investments in social welfare are discouraged and privatized (Katz 2001; Fraser 2014). For Fraser (2016), the dependency of capitalist economic production on social reproduction, mostly provided by the un-waged labour of women, combined with

the unsustainable logic of unlimited capital accumulation points to an inherent, but obscured, crisis tendency in capitalist society that threatens to destroy the very basis for its functioning: what she terms the "social-reproductive contradictions of financialized capitalism" (2016, 99).

There is increasing interest in understanding how the social reproduction crisis manifests itself in agrarian settings of the Global South under the current global financial capitalist regime. In the case of Indian rural society, Naidu and Ossome observe a crisis in the reproduction of households, such as care work and subsistence production, shouldered by women's invisible labour that is fundamental to guarantee the minimum consumption in households; it acts as a subsidy for capital accumulation, and "trap(s) women in their role in the reproductive household economy" (2016, 71). Moreover, the authors point to the importance of access to land for social reproduction and the inordinate burden borne by women, in context where private and common lands dispossession and loss of traditional livelihoods is triggered by current capitalist dynamics. For these two authors, a contradiction relies on the fact that "neoliberal capitalist expansion ignores and undermines the reproductive aspects of land and women's labour, even when capitalist accumulation depends on them" (2016, 71). Following Razavi (2003), they argue that land and agrarian reforms centred only on gender equity are insufficient for social transformation since they do not address the immiserating conditions – and related women' reproductive work – arising not only from patriarchal relations but agrarian class and ethnic structures, and the global economy that builds the conditions for peasant exploitation, particularly of women.

My research builds on Naidu and Ossome's focus on the analytical centrality of land, women's work, and social reproduction to understand the implications for women in accessing land in local settings under the current global dynamics of agrarian extractivism. My work is influenced by feminist poststructuralist ontologies of subjectivity and subject formation. Poststructuralists have questioned the focus on the binary division of gender and the essentialist approach in understanding gendered roles, values, ideologies, and performance (Butler 1990). Instead, poststructuralists understand gender as a malleable social construction that shapes and is shaped by various and complex subjectivities through symbolic and material everyday practices and processes,

and under specific contexts and histories (Butler 1990). My research strategically uses the category of gender in interaction with other categories of social difference to analyse their differentiated experiences in the productive and reproductive realms constitutive of agrarian capitalist dynamics (Hooks 2004; Mohanty 2008; Hawkins and Ojeda 2011). In doing this, I build on decolonial critics that question the use of an intersectional approach to merely count or map out the multiple forms of social difference, without looking at the multiple oppressive systems that produce and reproduce women's differentiations and the political actions to dismantle them (Lugones 2010; Curiel 2008; Curiel, Borzone, and Ponomareff 2016; McNally 2017). Rather, I am interested in "how the ensemble of practices which reproduce social life are simultaneously organized via multiple relations of domination and power" that are structural and systematically related to the capitalist structure (McNally 2017, 109).

1.3.2 Nature and the care work of food

Second, my research draws on constructivist Eco-feminism that has queried human-nature relations, along with the commonalities between the oppressions faced by women and the destruction of nature. It is important to note that the relationship posited by the Eco-feminists between women and nature has traditionally been understood in two distinct ways – one, through biologically different functions (the essentialist approach), and the other through social constructions and historical-economic contexts (the constructivist approach). For Mies (2014), there is a biological bias that understands the productive and reproductive work of women as a function of their nature instead of their interaction with nature. According to her, this mystifies the relationship of dominance and exploitation over women and nature, "dominance of the (male) human being over (female) nature" (2014, 45). Like the reproductive labour of women, the free appropriation of nature, "both as a source of 'inputs' to production and as a 'sink' to absorb the latter's waste" represents another background condition for capital accumulation (Fraser 2014, 63). This in turn constitutes an ecological limitation for capital reproduction, what O'Connor (1996) refers to as capitalism's inherent second contradiction of capitalist development. For O´Connor, "capitalist threats to the reproduction of production conditions are not only threats to profits and accumulation,

but also to the viability of the social and 'natural' environment as means of life" (1996, 213). FPE has drawn on the constructivist approach of Eco-feminism and continues to be influenced by new ways of thinking about the relation between nature and society today.

Originally, FPE centred on how existing power relations determine resources and environmental rights and responsibilities as well as differentiated knowledge about, and activism for the environment (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996). Following these initial ideas, current FPE work has redirected attention toward subjectivities created from specific ecologies, and on the role of nature in the creation of bodies and identities (Elmhirst 2011). Under this approach, gender is understood "as fluid and as intersectionally connected to other forms of difference through various power dynamics that are often deeply informed by, and themselves inform, spaces and natures" (Hawkins and Ojeda 2011, 250). Furthermore, recent FPE work also adds to post-humanist relational ontologies that understand nature as a "subject on its own right" to address human dominance over nature and species (Elmhirst 2015, 524). As observed by Elmhirst (2015), this expanded lens of embodied and material intersectionalities with the environment is being nurtured by renewed concepts of Eco-feminism that rectify former essentialist notions of female and nature relationships. Building on poststructuralist and post-humanist feminist theories, Elmhirst (2015, 2018) goes on to argue that FPE scholars have inserted the discussion on how an ethics of care works to sustain life while building a viable alternative to capitalist natural resource-based development. By doing this, they have also redirected the FPE approach towards a decolonial path to deconstruct the dominant and universalized epistemologies and reappraise the knowledge from the Global South, the marginalized academia or Indigenous worldviews (Elmhirst 2018).

My research is inspired by feminist scholars from Latin America working on the relation of gender, nature, and development under a decolonial lens, who have embraced the need to analyse care work under the specific and diverse realities of the region. They use the concept of care to distinguish the affective component and subjective ambiguities in the work carried out in the household that are directed to daily restitution and varies from one context to the other over time (Vega and Gutiérrez 2014; Carrasco 2016). For Carrasco (2016), despite the difficulties in defining the concept of care, in general terms it refers to those activities and arrangements that sustain people's lives without any

monetary compensation and satisfy the concrete biological and emotional needs of the extended family, friends, or proximate persons and communities. Carrasco (2016) introduces the concept of "sustainability of life" (2016, 46–47) to elucidate the interdependence between the care of human and the care of the environment as we live in and depend on nature for our survival. Following Carrasco, Vega and Gutiérrez (2014) argue that *Buen Vivir*, as understood in Indigenous worldviews, puts the sustainability of life at the center, in contrast to neoliberal notions of anthropocentrism and productivity. In this regard, extensive work that deals with the interdependent relations between human care and nature care have emerged in response to the extractive public policies implemented by seemingly progressive governments that have embraced *Buen Vivir* as their political goal (see Aguinaga, Astudillo, and López 2019; Varea and Zaragocín 2017; Radcliffe 2015; Coba and Bayón Jiménez 2020). My research aims to contribute new insights by analysing the linkages between the gendered care work of humans and nature and the principles of food sovereignty.

The peasant notion of food sovereignty was initially proposed by the transnational peasant movement *La Vía Campesina* in the mid 1990s, in opposition (and as an alternative) to the neoliberal corporate-led agricultural food system (Desmarais 2007). Today, the Nyéléni Forum held in Mali in 2007 represents the most important site of reference regarding food sovereignty, its Declaration containing six principles for understanding the meaning and radical nature of this concept.[12] However, food sovereignty has been embraced in different ways and at different levels by many diverse actors who have expanded and deepened it, both as a political project and theoretical approach (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010; Hospes 2013; Alonso-Fradejas et al. 2015). As noted by Alonso-Fradejas et al. (2015), we are dealing with a concept whose definition, broadly, encompasses a variety of food-related issues, as well as socio-political and economic scales, classes, and other social identities. In general terms, food

[12] These pillars included 1) food for people and not as a commodity, 2) valuing and recognizing the rights of food producers, 3) protection of local markets and food production instead of food aid, genetically modified organisms, unsustainable and inequitable international trade and powerful corporations, 4) local control of resources for food production instead of privatization, 5) revalorization of local knowledge and skills of food providers, and 6) working with nature (Nyéleni 2007).

sovereignty refers to "the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments" (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010, 2). Thus, food sovereignty is intrinsically rooted in power relations, the cultural meanings of food, and people's ability to make decisions regarding the fundamental aspects of food systems (Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2010). Rather than being an abstract project or theory, food sovereignty constitutes a relational construction based on "grounded practice of concrete political, economic and social steps towards a specific vision for the food system and the actors involved in it" (Robbins 2015, 452).

My research builds upon empirical research undertaken by scholars and practitioners of food sovereignty (Pérez and Soler 2013; Oliver 2016; Turner et al. 2020; Zuluaga, Catacora-Vargas, and Siliprandi 2018; Bezner K. et al. 2019) who not only make visible, but de-essentialize the daily care work of food production provided by women that is grounded on land, ecological conditions, and cultural and historical background. Again, the categorization of women in my enquiry is used strategically to de-encapsulate women within the concept of family farming that has traditionally hidden "structural and deep rooted" gender inequalities (Agarwal 2014, 1255) and women's productive and reproductive work within food sovereignty narratives (Jacobs 2014; Park, White, and Julia 2015). Furthermore, my research uses a relational approach to food sovereignty that centres on network building among actors at and across multiple levels and sites (Bezner K. et al. 2019; Schiavoni 2015; Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015). Unlike the notion of food sovereignty as an autarchic local food system, in my research food sovereignty "pertains to the ability to connect together technologies, peoples, and institutions into networks" (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015, 490). Under this relational notion, "sovereignty becomes a malleable and 'negotiable' power that can be seized by particular movements, people, or communities to create, oppose, or reshape against the state, cities, corporations, and other sovereign actors" (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015, 483). Thus, this approach posits that the integration of people working for food sovereignty in broader networks of resources, knowledge, and technologies can potentially lead to relationships that support and strengthen their local practices of food sovereignty while challenging unequal structures of power at multiple scales and sites.

1.3.3 Resistance against oppression

Progressive social movements search for an alternative to status quo unequal power relationships by carrying out a wide range of political activities. Benford and Snow (2000) refer to framing as the social movements' continuous and evolving work to create and sustain the meanings around a specific contentious issue that constitutes a difference from —and even a confrontation with— the status quo. The creation of a collective identity is closely related to the social movement's capacity to delineate political action. In this regard, Flesher Fominaya (2010) argues that collective identity formation includes elements such as positive emotional experiences, common ritual practices, shared meanings or consciousness, specific tactics or organizational style, and symbolic resources. Moreover, the notion of collective identity is built on a process of interactions —internal and external— that create strong emotional and affective ties among social movement members (Flesher Fominaya 2010). Thus, according to the author, collective identity is the result of the interaction between hidden and outward political activities. As she clearly puts it, "both of these types of activities provide crucial arenas in which activists can foster reciprocal ties of solidarity and commitment, and clarify their understandings of who they are, what they stand for and who the opposition is" (2010, 398).

Building on these insights, my research aims to achieve a nuanced view of how peasant organizations are responding to new rural dynamics, including how peasant women are implementing different political acts of resistance. The former is particularly important in my research area, especially where the absence of overt mobilization is a consequence of repressive and violent forms of historic land and resource historic appropriation. Thus, I give special attention to the concept of "everyday forms of resistance". Scott (1985) contends that the main problem of the concept of resistance is "a misleading, sterile, and sociologically naive insistence upon distinguishing 'self-indulgent,' individual acts, on the one hand, from presumably 'principled', selfless, collective actions, on the other, and excluding the former from the category of 'real' resistance" (1985, 295). Scott argues that acts that form a consistent pattern, even though uncoordinated and unorganized, can be called acts of resistance. For Scott, peasant resistance has an intrinsic self-interest rootedness in shared material struggles for survival

experienced by impoverished people. Thus, self-interest and resistance can neither be separated nor overlooked from the perspective of everyday resistance forms. Furthermore, he sees advantages in individual acts of resistance, observing that even though they might not turn into a political and formal organization or mass movement, these acts are flexible and resilient over the long term and cannot be easily co-opted and neutralized.

FPE centers on how women engage in collective action to challenge the current ecological and economic crises inherent to capitalist development that has worsened the conditions of low-income families and women entrusted with their survival (Rocheleau et al. 1996, 14). According to Rocheleau et al. (1996), this has led to an increase in political awareness and actions, especially by women who have responsibilities to "ensure the necessary conditions to guaranty subsistence, protect the health of their families, and the integrity of the surrounding ecosystems" (p. 16). Rocheleau et al.'s (1996) focus on collective actions is an important conceptual contribution in gender differentiated analysis of political ecology. However, other forms of political resistance need to be considered to fully analyse how women are defending natural resources and nature and challenging oppressive structures in which they have been historically immersed. To do so, this research expands the FPE approach and reflects upon the notion of culture that shapes contemporary resistance against oppresion. Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar (1998) define cultural politics as a process led by social actors with different cultural meanings and practices that challenge dominant social and political power. They assert that "when movements deploy alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy, or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings, they enact a cultural politics" (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 7). My research looks at acts of cultural positioning, both submerged/individual or open-declared/collective, that work together to transform the oppressive policies of the state and its institutions.

In addition, my research analyzes the extent to which the oppression embedded in the Ecuadorian state since colonial times continues to influence the autonomous capacities of peasant associations and condition their political actions and demands for food sovereignty today. In doing so, my research is inspired by the political and historical

sociology of Barrington Moore (1973)[13] to the existence and ability of the different classes (peasants, landlords, or bourgeoisie) in dispute to build "articulations or coalitions" (1973, 346) to enforce their interests during modernization processes. Drawing on Moore (1973), my research uses the historical work of scholars (R. Guerrero 1978; Chiriboga 1980; A. Guerrero 1980; Fisher 1983; North 1985; Larrea and North 1997; Larrea 2006; Maiguashca 2012) who have inquired into the existence of peasant movements and their interaction with the Ecuadorian state throughout the different stages of capitalist development in Guayas province. This historical perspective is important to better understand the repetition, or renovation, of mechanisms of oppression that work ultimately against women's emancipation and autonomous peasant mobilization. In doing so, my research contributes to studies dealing with the historical patronage politics maintained by many of the pink-tide governments in Latin America that fractured the radical and autonomous mobilization capacity of peasant movements in return for public offices, limited benefits from productivity and market-based agrarian policies, and welfare programs (Lapegna 2013; Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017; Rosset and Barbosa 2021).

[13] Moore draws from the role played by peasants and landlords in the transformation from feudal to modern societies. For the author, there are four paths of feudal regime transformation: 1) the occidental democratic path that results from bourgeoisie revolutions in England, France, and the United States; 2) the reactionary path that results from "Top-down revolutions" or through a conservative alliances between rural and urban elites that lead to fascism in Germany, Japan and Italy; 3) a communist path, as a result of "peasant revolutions" in China and Russia; and 4) an uncertain or failed path in India that, during Moore's study, did not lead to an industrial and modern society (Moore 1973, 335). For Moore, occidental democracies are "long and certainly incomplete" struggles to eliminate arbitrary regimes, replace the arbitrary for just and rational regimes, and enable people to participate in the political regimes (Moore 1973: 336).

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research area and participants

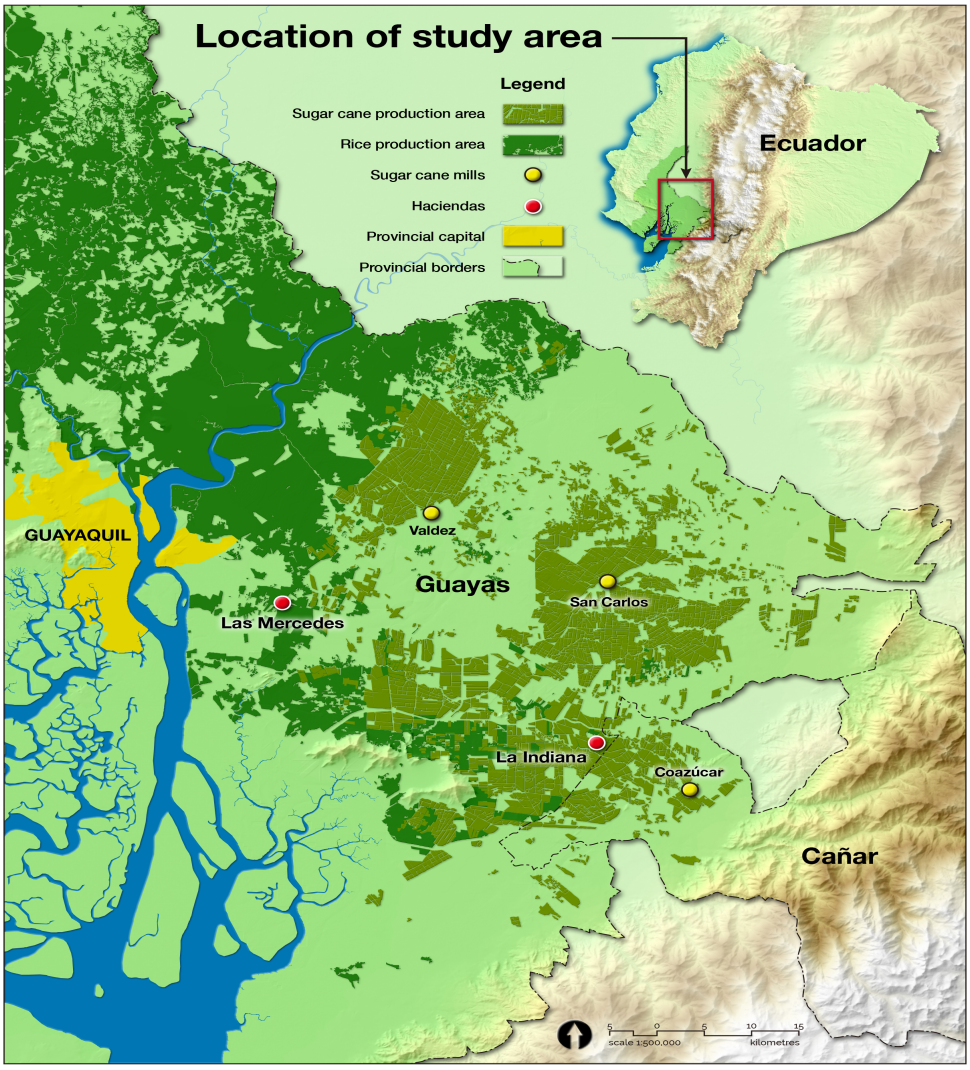
My research centers on two rural estates located in Guayas province[14] that were made available for distribution within *Plan Tierras*, namely *Hacienda La Indiana* and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* (see Map 1). *Hacienda La Indiana*, that together encompasses approximately 1,200 hectares, is located in the parish of Puerto Inca, while *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, approximately 2,000 hectares, is located in the proximity of Guayaquil. *La Indiana* is a rural estate that has for decades provided sugar cane to one of the main sugar cane mills, Coazúcar (formerly AZTRA-EQ2). As for *Las Mercedes*, for the most part, it has been dedicated to large-scale rice cultivation and livestock farming. Both haciendas were seized from the Isaías Group, a group of corrupt bankers that were held responsible for the financial crisis in the late 1990s.

Peasant associations bought *Hacienda La Indiana* through the government-sponsored land policy *Plan Tierras* in order to meet the higher demand for sugar cane for the agro-fuels state program. Peasant associations in *Hacienda La Indiana* are affiliated to the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Agroindustriales Campesinos e Indígenas Libres del Ecuador* – FENACLE (National Federation of Agro-industry Workers, Peasants, and Indigenous Peoples) and the *Confederación de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas Campesinas del Ecuador* – FEI (Confederation of People and Indigenous and Peasant Organizations of Ecuador), both part of the *Coordinadora Latino Americana de Organizaciones del Campo* - CLOC)/La Vía Campesina (Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations). Meanwhile, other peasant associations accessed land in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* under the same land policy, but they did so with the objective of becoming rice producers. The *Unión Tierra y Vida* (Land and Life Union) represent the interests of most peasant associations in this agrarian setting. The latter peasant associations have been negatively affected by the expansion of sugar cane on surrounding fields and by other agrarian extractivist sectors such as bananas and shrimp, an aggressive policy of

[14] *Hacienda La Indiana* is located at the border of Guayas with Cañar provinces while the sugar cane mills Coazúcar is located in the city La Troncal, located in Cañar province and 76 km from Guayaquil city.

agrochemical inputs promotion, and the lack of public support for agricultural products other than rice.

Map 1: Location of *Hacienda La Indiana* and *Las Mercedes* in Guayas, Ecuador



Elaborated by Marcel Morin and the author with the support of María Lira and data from MAG 2012, Ingenios Azucareros escala 1:50.000; Instituto Geográfico Militar; Geoportal del Agro Ecuatoriano, Estimación de caña de azúcar industrial 2020 – 1:25.000.

In the area of my study, most of the population identify themselves as *mestizos*. In Latin America, colonized by Spain, the concept *mestizo* was introduced to politically and legally classify the children of a Spanish father and an Indigenous mother (Stolcke 2009). According to Stolcke (2009), while granting an ambiguous social identity, the institutionalization of *mestizos* validated and reinforced existing socio-cultural

differences and inequalities to ensure an hierarchal order. In the new republic of Ecuador, *mestizaje* constituted the national project for eliminating the Indigenous population (Álvarez 2002; Guerrero 1994) whose land in the coastal region was violently grabbed for the expansion of successive export-oriented agricultural waves in the earlier stages of capitalist development. In the particular region of Guayas where I conducted my study, another ethnic construct that came to light in the early twentieth century was that of the *montubio*, the coastal *mestizo* peasant. The *montubio* was negatively stereotyped as melancholy, independent, violent and "hopelessly attached to his machete" (Middleton 1979, 318). This categorization contrasted sharply with the 'subservience' attributed to Indigenous highland people and the 'civilized' character attributed to the urban *mestizo*.

In the late 20th century, the dominant multicultural development paradigm of the neoliberal phase focused on the Indigenous highland population and neglected other ethnic identities (Álvarez 2002; Bretón 2005).[15] Thus, cultural perceptions and the dominant development model excluded *mestizo* peasants, most importantly women, in Guayas and other coastal provinces, from development policy debates and ignored in gender and other social science studies since they did not qualify as part of the vulnerable population (Baquerizo 2014, 2020). This situation changed as investment and resources were directed to other ethnic identities and the term *montubio* were mobilized with the 2008 constitution. Thus, the retrieval of the label *montubio*, and (*mestizo*) peasants appeared to bring political and economic benefits. It was under this political context that the implementation of public policies *Plan Tierras*, promised to favour peasant associations, at least those who unconditionally supported PAIS Alliance governments.

1.4.2 Paradigm and strategy of inquiry

For Creswell, a worldview is "a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" (2014, 6) shaped, in part, by the previous experience of the researcher. In my case, my worldview stems from my 15 years of work as a human rights activist with national, regional, and international peasant, small

[15] With the Indigenous uprising of the early 1990s and the political risks that this represented for white-*mestizo* elites, development agencies and NGOs centered their attention on the Indigenous population, especially in the Andean highlands (Álvarez 2002; Bretón 2005).

farmers' and Indigenous organizations and networks in their struggles for land and food sovereignty. In particular, from 2006 to 2016, I conducted field research for several policy reports on land and agrarian policies and undertook research in Guayas to support advocacy work with public institutions at local and national levels. Moreover, during June 2013 to June 2014, I prepared my MA thesis at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, FLACSO-Ecuador, focussing on the land struggles of the peasant associations that had settled on *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. Building on this work and academic experience, my doctoral research raises issues of gendered inequality and marginalization, asymmetric power relationships, and mechanisms of oppression within peasant associations and corporate-led agriculture and food systems that are relevant issues for Ecuadorian society at large. It also discusses peasant organization resistance strategies and alternatives, with special attention given to women's participation and the need to collectively construct an advocacy agenda that generates social change.

All these aspects of my research fit into what Mertens (2009) has identified as a transformative worldview. For the author, a transformative paradigm centres on the experiences of marginalized groups and on their forms of oppression as well as strategies of resistance to overcome situations of injustice. This worldview also focuses on power relationships and political and social actions as responses to existing gender, race, ethnic, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic inequalities (Mertens 2009). Thus, as a researcher with a transformative worldview and a background in activism, I embrace a critical ethnographic approach (Madison 2005; Thomas 1993). Critical ethnography centers on "conventional, taken-for-granted conceptions about the world and how we think about it in order to move beyond 'what is' to a state of 'what could be'" (Thomas 1993, 20). Critical ethnographers challenge the existing assumptions embedded in institutions, knowledge, and social practices that perpetuate oppression and injustice. Madison (2005) states that critical scholars "resist domestication" of perceptions, understandings, and thought. Furthermore, critical researchers contribute to the emancipation of subjugated peoples by supporting them in pursuing socially just alternatives (Madison, 2005). Another concept that is implicit as part of critical ethnographic thought is activism that refers to a position and actions in which the researcher collaborates with and advocates for marginalized people.

Activism is a concept closely linked to "positionality", i.e. activist researchers consciously assume a position that corresponds to the political causes pursued by the population with whom they are working to effect social change. According to Madison, "positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects" (Madison 2005, 5). Critical ethnography takes a step back from the alleged value-neutral position, recognizing that neutrality is often used to reproduce unequal power relationships (Madison 2005; Hale 2008). Today, critical approaches advocate for a "positioned objectivity," giving new meaning to the concept of objectivity. According to Hale, "research that is predicted on alignment with a group of people organized in struggle, and on collaborative relations of knowledge production with members of that group, has the potential to yield privileged insights, analysis, and theoretical innovation that otherwise would be impossible to achieve" (Hale 2008, 20). Thus, positioned objectivity encompasses a special responsibility for both activist researchers and community members as participants of a research project. As empowered and knowledgeable participants, community members take on responsibility for the validity, legitimacy, and use of the research outcome (Hale 2008). As for the researchers, responsibility also derives from their "advantageous position to develop a deep, multifaceted, and complex understanding of the topic under study" (Hale 2008, 20).

1.4.3 Research methods

Using a critical ethnography approach, I conducted extensive and in-depth qualitative research through different data gathering techniques. The principal research techniques that I used in this research were semi-structured interviews and "observing participation", a version of participant observation.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted using a guide that focuses on predetermined issues and topic areas relevant for a research project. Although questions are previously organized in a certain order, the questioning proceeds in a flexible manner as the interview progresses allowing the researcher to omit or change the order of the questions as well as redirect the interview if and when it has been diverted from the original goal (Dunn 2008). For Howitt and Stevens, semi-structured interviews are a

culturally sensitive research technique as they enable "interactive discussions or conversations in which there can be reciprocal exchange of information" (2005, 64) between the researcher and research participants. The interviews become an opportunity for the research participants to get to know the researcher and vice versa as they share their knowledge and experiences about the research topics and issues in a culturally appropriate manner (Howitt and Stevens 2005; Dunn 2008). In this research, I developed interview guides that listed questions directly related to my key research questions (see Appendixes). The preliminary drafts of interview schedules were revised by my advisors, organization leaders and the Ethics Committee of the University of Manitoba to ensure efficacy as well as ethical and cultural appropriateness. The final version of my interview guides was geared to elicit the perceptions, opinions and experiences of different actors at the multiple scales involved in my research, i.e. public institutions, private sector, peasant associations/regional organizations, and academic experts.

Semi-structured interviews were complemented by participant observation, a method that permits studying a social process while being part of or engaging in activities of a specific social group. Participant observation can be defined as "a conscious and systematic sharing, in so far as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons" (Jackson 1983, 39). In contrast to interviews, the main goal of participant observation is to "develop understanding through being part of the spontaneity of everyday interactions" (Kearns 2016, 318). This reveals the strategic, intentional and more spontaneous nature of participant observation to understand a social process. In my research, I specifically undertook "observing participation", which emphasizes the role of a researcher as an insider to study specific aspects of life around their research participants (Bernard 2006). My role as an observing participant in this research allowed me to understand the context and process in which association members and their umbrella organizations interact with other state actors involved in the land distribution program *Plan Tierras* and related rural development programs.[16] As an observing participant, my aim was to take part in many

[16] The use of this research method aimed not to collect personal data. As such, the observational research I conducted did not allow for the identification of single participants in the dissemination of my results.

relevant activities conducted by the associations, from agricultural work in the haciendas to advocacy work with public officials in different institutions, and/or regular organizational assemblies in association offices. These experiences allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of peasant associations in extractivist dynamics.

Finally, to complement my data gathering and analysis, I conducted a comprehensive critical review of available documents, as well as three focus groups. I also conducted online follow-up interviews with key research participants. I structured my field research in four phases drawing from different types of research participants who were selected based on which of my key research questions they most appropriately addressed.

Below, I further describe the principal and secondary research methods and explain how they were helpful to gather, organize and analysis data in each research phase. As discussed below, my field research was not free of difficulties.

Phase I

In phase I, I first collected and reviewed meaningful available sources to obtain contextual data related to the development of agro-fuels and agrarian extractivism in Guayas. As for the recruitment of research participants in this phase, I sought out individuals who are involved (directly or indirectly) in the state agro-fuel program *Ecopaís* as well as other sugar cane-derived products and by-products. This group of participants consisted of agrarian experts, leaders of national-regional peasant organizations, small-scale producers' associations, and workers' unions, as well as representatives of ministries responsible for the agro-fuel program and the private sector (sugar cane mills, distilleries, and their associations; see Appendix 1 for the detailed list of research participants). The recruitment procedure in this phase made use of available data sources on websites to contact potential research participants involved in the agro-fuel program. I sent emails or called individuals, whose identity was publicly available, using the script I provide in Appendix 2, and I gave them sufficient time to contact me if they were interested in participating in my research project. Some individuals that I

contacted were helpful in identifying other potential research participants whose contact information was also available in the public domain.

Upon receiving ethics approval from the University of Manitoba in October 2018, I started the semi-structured individual interviews (See Appendix 5 for questions list phase 1) with the Phase 1 research participants. In total, I interviewed 15 research participants (See Appendix 1 for participants recruitment scheme). Some of the difficulties I encountered included the fact that the Ecuadorian government had undertaken an institutional restructuring that formed part of its austerity policy, leading to the elimination of some ministries and the merging of others. This meant that I needed to amend the list of public officials that I had initially designed for my interviews. I also experienced difficulties in setting up interviews with the sugar cane workers' unions of the three major sugar cane mills. Although I explained the confidentiality principles of Canadian research ethics (see section on ethical considerations), some were not willing to be interviewed because they were afraid of reprisals by the mill owners and/or bosses. In fact, only one workers' union leader agreed to be interviewed.[17] Another problem emerged from the Ecuadorian government's decision to reduce subsidies for the agro-fuel program and other fuels, a decision that became a highly contentious and politicized issue for Ecuadorian society. This, in turn, affected the willingness of some actors, especially public officials, to provide interviews.[18] In practical terms, all these difficulties delayed some of the interviews of phase I that I ended up conducting on dates that overlapped with interviews I conducted in phases II and III.

Phase II

In phase II, the research participants were members of the associations affiliated in the three umbrella organizations, namely FENACLE and FEI in *Hacienda La Indiana* and

[17] It is well known that the sugar cane mills exert influence over the organizational structure of workers' unions. The union representative who agreed to be interviewed belongs to the only union whose administration is independent from the sugar cane mill.

[18] For example, the then vice Minister of Hydrocarbons unexpectedly cancelled an interview at his office in Quito only a few hours before it was to take place, arguing that this Ministry was not the principal actor involved in agro-fuel public policy.

Tierra y Vida in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. As mentioned earlier, these peasant associations acceded land in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* and *Hacienda La Indiana* through the public land policy *Plan Tierras* and have been affected by the development of agrarian extractivist policies in Guayas. In addition to four associations affiliated to FENACLE and FEI in *Hacienda La Indiana*, this group includes 9 associations from *Tierra y Vida*[19] in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* (See Appendix 1 for participants recruitment scheme). I consulted the leaders of the umbrella organizations and their peasant associations about the most appropriate recruitment strategy of participants. Following agreements with the associations regarding the most effective and gender inclusive way of recruiting members (Appendix 3), I participated in meetings with the associations and directly invited their members to participate in my research. With the support of representatives of the three umbrella organizations (FENACLE, FEI, and *Tierra y Vida*) and association leaders, I aimed at getting multiple perspectives on the historical, political, social, and economic factors that affect peasant associations through gender-balanced recruitment in each association.

During this phase, I observed activities that helped me to understand the context in which peasant associations from the haciendas interact with other actors involved in agrarian and land policies. As observing participant, I took part in relevant associative activities that helped me to gain familiarity and build relations of trust with association members (Bernard 2006). For example, I was able to accompany the advocacy work of *Tierra y Vida* with public officials in different institutions and to attend regular organizational assemblies in the *Hacienda Las Mercedes* or the office in Guayaquil. In March 2019, after setting up the research agreements with peasant associations, I started interviewing association members, using a semi-structured schema. A list of questions (Appendix 6) allowed for culturally respectful, fluid, and flexible conversations with peasants of low educational levels. In the *Hacienda La Indiana,* I interviewed in total 16 members of the associations *Buen Vivir, Cooperativa La Indiana*, and *27 de Octubre*. As

[19] The associations *Atara, Rafael Brito Mendoza* and *Emmanuel* separated from *Tierra y Vida*. The association *Ex-Trabajadores* has alternated its membership between *Tierra y Vida* and the National Coordination Eloy Alfaro (CNC), an organization known for its ambiguous position towards the PAIS Alliance government. In Chapter Four, I discuss the reasons for the separation of the associations from Tierra y Vida.

for the *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, I interviewed 29 members of the associations *Victoria de las Mercedes, Patria Nueva, Nueva Revolución, Fe del Campesino, Ganaderos Félix Mora, Emmanuel, Rafael Brito Mendoza, Atara, Ex-Trabajadores de la Hacienda* (Appendix 1). Also, I organized two gender-balanced focus groups with research participants on both haciendas (Appendix 7) to cross-check the data gathered through the interviews (Frey and Fontana 1991; Cameron 2008).

The problems I faced during phase II arose from internal conflicts between some associations and their umbrella organizations. In the *Hacienda La Indiana* there was an open conflict between the president of the umbrella organization FENACLE and affiliated associations. This derived from the corruption practices of their former association leaders, apparently imposed by the umbrella organization, that led to serious conflicts and great distrust between the association members. During my field research, new young association members who took on the leadership of the associations were working to create cohesion and trust within and between the associations. This affected my research, since they were hesitant to allow observing participation in activities that could reveal organizational issues. Consequently, I was not invited to attend their advocacy activities with public officials. In *Hacienda Las Mercedes,* some associations separated from *Tierra y Vida*, an event that I will discuss extensively in Chapter Four. Although I managed to interview some leaders of the detached associations, this conflict prevented me from conducting more interviews with other members.

Another problem I faced was the irregular presence of association members in the haciendas. This was particularly true for *Hacienda La Indiana* where most association members do not live in this rural estate. For example, I did not succeed in finding a convenient time for an interview with a female leader of the peasant association *Arroceros de Cone* who lives in the city of Durán, approximately 70 km from the *Hacienda*. Despite her initial willingness to be interviewed and to provide me with the possibility of contacting other members, in the end, I was not able to include this peasant association in my research. Finally, my aim of conducting gender-balanced interviews among the associations was not possible in all cases. In the association *27 de Octubre* of *Hacienda La Indiana*, I was explicitly told that no women were participating actively in this association, and as a result, interviews were mainly conducted with men. As table 2

shows, I managed to have more representation of women in the interviews in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* than in *Hacienda La Indiana*. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the reasons for the different levels of involvement of women in the organizational and productive activities in the two haciendas.

Table 1. 2 Number of participants by gender, phase II

Haciendas	Associations	Men	Women
La Indiana	*27 de Octubre*	3	1
	Buen Vivir	3	3
	Coop. La Indiana	3	3
Total *Hacienda La Indiana*		**9**	**7**
Las Mercedes	*Victoria de las Mercedes*	2	4
	Patria Nueva	3	4
	Nueva Revolución	3	1
	Fe del Campesino	1	3
	Ganaderos FML	1	2
	Others (not part of *Tierra y Vida*)	2	3
Total *Hacienda Las Mercedes*		**12**	**17**

Author's elaboration based on interviews conducted.

Phase III

In phase III, I first deepened my understanding of how food sovereignty is conceptualized and practiced in Ecuador through a comprehensive document review. I also conducted a total of 11 semi-structured individual interviews (Appendix 1) based on a preliminary list of questions (Appendix 8) with different individuals who are involved in the promotion and development of food sovereignty and related policies in Guayas. This interview format allowed an adaptive approach as the interview progressed (Dunn 2008), adding questions about bottlenecks in implementing *Plan Tierras* and other *Food Sovereignty* related policies that I had identified from previous research phases. I also enjoyed the possibility of discussing these aspects in a fluid and open way with leaders of the peasant organizations such as *Tierra y Vida*. The main problem I encountered in phase III arose from a lack of specific food sovereignty knowledge on the part of the representatives of public institutions in my research region. An in-depth search in the region allowed me to contact specialized public officers from the Decentralized Autonomous Government of

Guayas and the Plurinational and Intercultural Conference of Food Sovereignty (COPISA), who were born in the province of Guayas. Immediately after I conducted the interviews of phase III, I had to begin the analysis and writing of my first chapter for a workshop on Agrarian Extractivism in Latin America held in September 2019 in Calgary. I was planning to conduct a focus group to discuss the outcomes of phase III with research participants as part of a follow-up work that I planned to undertake in March 2020. Of course, this proved to be impossible with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in early 2020.

Follow-up phase

Follow-up interviews undertaken at the same or at a time following the original interview helped "to get more depth and understanding about an idea, a concept, a theme, an event, or an issue" (Rubin and Rubin 2012, 173). When conducting interviews in both haciendas, some research participants hinted at specific examples of the productive alternatives they were deploying on their plots of land, but the limited time for conducting interviews did not allow for more thorough responses on that particular theme. Through participant observation, I was already familiar with women's practices of food sovereignty in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*.[20] Indeed, during 2019 and with the support of the umbrella organization *Tierra y Vida*, women organized different activities, such as gatherings, visits, or collective work, aimed at getting to know each other, fostering solidary and trusting relations, and establishing supportive networks. These activities worked to break down the walls among women whose relationships had previously been mistrustful and distant due to conflicts and divisions among the associations. It was through these activities that women started to listen to each other's stories, empathize with the problems they all faced at different spheres and share practices of food sovereignty that they were building. Once the pandemic started and I was analysing the collected data in the city of Winnipeg, it became crucial for my research to dig more into

[20] During my field work it was not possible to identify practices of food sovereignty in *Hacienda La Indiana*. This is does not deny the existence of agroecological practices hinted at by Ericsson (2013) especially in the association *Cooperativa La Indiana,* whose members are not required to produce sugar cane in their plots of land and have switched to cash crops such as cacao.

these emancipatory practices and understand how women were adapting them to the immediate challenges posed during the early months of the global pandemic.

The global pandemic that started in early 2020 raised challenges for academic researchers using qualitative methods (Sedysheva 2020). This was true for my research project also, as it was impacted by mobility restrictions imposed worldwide that hindered the possibility to conduct my in-site follow-up work. As in many other rural settings in underdeveloped countries, peasant associations that were involved in this research have been widely using mobile phones and the application WhatsApp as communication tools for organizational matters, even before the pandemic. However, with the mobilization restrictions and the prohibition of face-to-face activities imposed during COVID 19 lockdown, these digital resources became the only way of maintaining the interaction between association members. This, in turn, raised great limitations given the poor access to electricity supply and stable internet connectivity among many of my research participants. Using WhatsApp voice messages and texts, I was able to carry out six remote follow-up interviews during 2020 with women that I previously interviewed in person during my field work in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. While gathering complementary data on their food sovereignty practices, the online interviews served to maintain the interpersonal relationship and trust that I had built through previous face-to-face interviews and participant observation. In addition to the online interviews, on April 2nd 2021, I also organized a focus group with women via Zoom to discuss the outcomes of Chapter Three. The focus group was small group since coverage of broadband internet continued to be restricted in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*.

In addition, I used online communication via WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger with leaders of *Hacienda La Indiana* and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* to clear up doubts that I encountered while I was drafting the main body of this manuscript and to receive updated and first-hand information on the development of the organizational advocacy work through 2020 and 2021. Finally, I also used the governmental platform of the Ministry of Agriculture for online communications with public officials in charge of *Plan Tierras* to request specific additional information that I needed to complement my analysis.

1.4.4 Data processing and analysis

According to Dunn (2008), the analysis of data content aims to construct themes and relations between variables and patterns. It includes the manifest content analysis (visible content of the transcript), and the latent content analysis (determination of meanings) (Dunn 2008). During my research, I took and scanned methodological (systematic description of activities), descriptive (detailed explanation about behaviours and environments), and analytical (annotated ideas and reflections) field notes of participant observation (Bernard 2006). Also, I captured the data collected through the semi-structured interviews through audio recording and backed it up through written notes. Then, with the support of a hired assistant, interview transcriptions were digitalized for analysis during my field-work. In order to organize and analyze the collected data, I proceeded with qualitative coding, using an inductive approach (Cope 2008). My three research questions served as the main reference for organizing and analysing collected data while preliminary thoughts based on research methods provided the main areas of inquiry under which ideas and concepts were further organized (H. O'Connor and Gibson 2003). For this purpose, I used the computer program Nvivo that allowed me to systematically organize the data and link the responses of my research participants to each area of inquiry. Table 3 outlines the main areas of inquiry and associated methods corresponding to each question and the chapters that develop the analysis of this dissertation.

My various data sources allowed me to increase the validity of my interpretation, along with a review process of my findings with participants (H. O'Connor and Gibson 2003). The hiring of an assistant to prepare the transcriptions just after the interviews was made possible by research funding provided by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) Doctoral Research Award 2018. The review of written transcripts allowed me to establish preliminary thoughts and interpretations that I could share with research participants to increase validity while engaged in my field work. This validation process included conducting two on-site focus groups where I could share my preliminary thoughts and interpretations with association members on both haciendas in May 2019. It also included conducting one remote focus group, using the online conferencing service Zoom in May 2021; in that exchange, women of *Tierra y Vida* associations gathered

together and shared their perspectives with each other on the findings of Chapter Three. The validated findings and narratives build the empirical and theoretical foundation of the three chapters that comprise the main part of this 'sandwich style' dissertation, i.e. academic papers for journal and book publication. Despite the length limitations of journal articles, I placed value, to the extent possible, in including translated citations from my research participants, especially women of the associations. This was important to guarantee that the voices and understandings of women are put at the center of my doctoral research.

Table 1. 3 Summary of areas of inquiry according to research questions and methods

Phase 1			
Research question	**Areas of inquiry**	**Associated methods**	**Chapters**
What are the new features of the current agrarian extractivist process in the agriculture, and how is it redefining access to and control of land and other resources in Guayas province?	Actors' involvement, Production stages and facilities (extraction, processing, transportation, sale and consumption), Land tenure and access to land, Associative model, Access to technological inputs and machinery, Access to market, Organization of productive labour, Environmental and health effects, Role of the state.	Document Review; Semi-structured interviews; Participant observation.	Chapter Two: Gender inclusion in the sugar cane production of agro-fuels in *Hacienda La Indiana*: Illusionary promises of rural development within a new agrarian extractivism Chapter Three: Gendered access to land, rice production, and social reproduction in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*: a Feminist Political Economy-Ecology analysis
Phase 2			
What are the fundamental gender-differentiated changes of peasant associations in *Hacienda La Indiana* and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* generated by their access to land through the public policy *Plan Tierras* and their involvement in the commodity chains of sugar cane and rice, respectively?	Social background, Struggle for land (individual/collective) Gendered access to land, Associative model, Access to technological inputs and machinery, Access to market, Gendered division of productive and reproductive work (associations, agricultural production, and households), Awareness on environmental and health quality, Resistance strategies, Role of state	Participant observation; Semi-structured interviews; In-site and online focus group.	Chapter Two: Gender inclusion in the sugar cane production of agro-fuels in *Hacienda La Indiana*: Illusionary promises of rural development within a new agrarian extractivism Chapter Three: Gendered access to land, rice production, and social reproduction in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*: a Feminist Political Economy-Ecology analysis Chapter Four: The criminalization of mobilization for land in coastal Ecuador: lessons learned for the food sovereignty movement
Phase 3			
Is the Ecuadorian state generating conditions under which an women's emancipation and autonomous peasant mobilization for land and food sovereignty can be reinforced to challenge the conflicting scenarios of the extractive agricultural model?	Struggle for land (individual/collective, past/present), Associative model Relation state and associations Women' leadership, Gendered access to land, Women participation in associations advocacy, Women cultivation of food crops, Other alternatives to conventional markets	Document Review; Participant observation; Semi-structured individual interviews; In-site and online focus group.	Chapter Three: Gendered access to land, rice production, and social reproduction in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*: a Feminist Political Economy-Ecology analysis Chapter Four: The criminalization of mobilization for land in coastal Ecuador: lessons learned for the food sovereignty movement

1.4.5 Ethical considerations

This research proceeded in agreement with the ethics principles of respect to persons, welfare, and justice. In December 2017, I consulted the leaders of the three peasant organizations to help ensure the usefulness of my research objectives in meeting their needs. Before I started my field research, I completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE). Furthermore, my research received approval from the University of Manitoba Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (Protocol #J2018: 076) in October 30th, 2018. In agreement with ethics procedures, I obtained voluntary, informed, and ongoing consent from all different research participants prior to all interviews (Appendix 9-12). I guaranteed the right of all research participants to their privacy and confidentiality and withheld the names of those who opted to protect their privacy and anonymity. In their place, numbers or pseudonyms were used. Given the particularly violent context in the coastal region, I took special consideration to avoid exposing associations members and leaders to potential personal insecurity and to protect the information provided by them. Because of the low literacy level of peasants and mistrust concerning the misuse of people's signatures for other purposes, it was important to read the consent form during association assemblies and previous to the interview, providing adequate time to respond to every question they had about their participation in the study. During that moment, I also presented the potential benefits and risks of my research for both individuals and the associations while offering detailed information about my study. The transcription assistant also signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix 13). Other steps to guarantee principles of respect, welfare, and justice for my research participants can be read throughout the informed consent forms attached in Appendices 9-12.

1.5 Organization of dissertation

The body of this dissertation is organized in three chapters that discuss the research findings, accompanied by this Introduction and a General Conclusions chapter. Each of the finding chapters is preceded by a short preface that situates the chapter within the three research questions that guided the research.

Chapter Two analyzes the new extractive dynamics of sugar cane production in Guayas focussing on the associations that bought land through *Plan Tierras* in

Hacienda La Indiana. These associations became part of the agrarian program *Agroenergía* to complement the higher demand of sugar cane to produce ethanol for the *Ecopaís* program. In this chapter, I look at the role of the Ecuadorian governments of PAIS Alliance in developing an extractive agro-fuel project with a social component used to legitimize the oligopolistic power of sugar cane mills and their distilleries linked to agri-business interests. The chapter characterizes the new extractive process in the agriculture by providing insights into the social, economic, and environmental effects of peasants, especially women, and the disproportionately oppression they face while becoming involved in this rural development approach.

Chapter Three continues the analysis of the new extractive dynamics in Guayas focussing on peasant associations that accessed land in the seized *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. To engage in the production of rice, for the most part, associations became tied to productivity-led programs that promote access to a technological kit controlled by corporate agri-business. Here, I expand the analysis on how this rural development approach has a disproportionately effect on women, given their extended responsibilities in rice production and association activities, as well as the accelerated contamination of subsistence means for household reproduction. The chapter also discusses four experiences of women in *Las Mercedes* that reflect how they are challenging the conditions of impoverishment and the contamination of bodies, land, and nature.

Chapter Four looks at the historic and contemporary mobilization for land of peasant associations in the coastal province of Guayas. The chapter explores the relation between peasant associations and the state in the light of the historic politics of patronage and related corruption and violence that maintained the political and economic power of agrarian elites and land tenure inequity in Guayas province. I discuss the repetition of specific paternalistic mechanisms for controlling peasant associations used by the subsequent PAIS Alliance governments. Peasant associations, with the strong participation of women leaders, carry out an openly declared -- but nevertheless criminalized -- mobilization that is challenging the culture of patronage of a state that continues serving the interests of the dominant rural elite.

Finally, the chapter of general conclusions examines the empirical findings chapters in relation to my three main research questions and outlines theoretical and practical contributions of this doctoral project. I conclude by identifying avenues for future academic research and recommendations for rural development policies.

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Preface to Chapter Two

This chapter mainly focuses on my first research question: What are the new features of the current agrarian extractivist process in the agriculture in Guayas province? In this chapter, I discuss the role of the state in promoting agrarian extractivism, and the mechanisms implemented by the dominant rural elite to control the surplus value derived sugar cane-based agro-fuels. To have a nuanced analysis on the effects of the agrarian structure, I situate my analysis in *Hacienda La Indiana*. In doing this, the chapter also addresses my second research question: what are the fundamental gender-differentiated changes within peasant associations generated by their access to land through the public policy *Plan Tierras* and their inclusion in the production of sugar cane. The insights provided in this chapter are important to understand the gender-differentiated social, economic and environmental effects in peasant associations from becoming involved in an extractive model of production. They are also important to understand how they differ from effects experienced by associations of *Hacienda Las Mercedes* involved in the production of rice that I discuss in Chapter Three.[21]

Photo 2. 1 A sugar cane field in Hacienda La Indiana



Photo taken by author

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2 Chapter Two: Gender inclusion in the sugar cane production of agro-fuels in *Hacienda La Indiana*: Illusionary promises of rural development within a new agrarian extractivism

Abstract

This chapter analyzes the new extractive dynamics of sugar cane production in the coastal Guayas province of Ecuador. The research focuses on the associations in *Hacienda La Indiana* that became part of the agrarian program *Agroenergía* to complement the higher demand of sugar cane to produce ethanol for the *Ecopaís* program. In this chapter, I contend that the Ecuadorian governments of PAIS Alliance have been developing an extractive agro-fuel project with a social component used to legitimize the oligopolistic power of sugar cane mills and their distilleries. Through public resources, the three largest sugar cane mills and their distilleries control today not only the production but also the processing whereby sugar cane becomes ethanol and acquires added value. The chapter aims to contribute to recent efforts to characterize the extractive nature of flex-crop monocultures by offering new insights into the social, economic and environmental implications of this process for small-scale farmers, especially women, and the disproportionate effects they face in an extractive and patriarchal system.

2.1 Introduction

The Ecuadorian state promotes the expansion of sugar cane in Guayas province while using a discourse of energy sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and rural development. In 2010, the Ecuadorian government established the *Ecopaís* program that aimed to lower the costs of imported high-octane gasoline through a 5% sugar cane-based ethanol blend mandate, while reducing carbon emissions and strengthening the sugar cane agroindustry with new investments. Initially distributed only in Guayaquil, the program was expanded to other cantons in Guayas province. In 2015, the government decreed the increase of the blend mandate to 10% ethanol in *Ecopaís* and its progressive application throughout the country. Agro-fuels form part of the productive and energy transformation process pursued by the PAIS Alliance, a self-described political "movement", or party in power since 2006-2007. The successive governments of the PAIS Alliance have promoted the transformation of the productive

and energy matrix in efforts to overcome the problems generated by Ecuador's historic primary-export and extractive-led economic model. As argued by its proponents, this policy differs from traditional capital accumulation since it is based on principles of "solidarity, responsibility and social inclusion" (Marx-Carrasco 2014). The goal is to create diversified and greater value-added production and develop new knowledge and capacities with regard to technology, eco-efficiency, and biodiversity (SENPLADES 2012).

Most scholars, however, argue that the much desired productive diversification and industrialization have been minimal and that Ecuador continues to depend heavily on the exportation of primary products (Larrea and Greene 2018; Larrea and Larrea 2017; Dávalos and Albuja 2014). According to the Central Bank of Ecuador (2020) the export of oil, bananas, and shrimp continues to be the country's main exports, with oil as the principal source of export revenue. Indeed, the development approach implemented by PAIS Alliance has been referred to as "new or neo-extractivism" (Acosta 2013; Gudynas 2009; Veltmeyer 2013; Veltmeyer and Petras 2014). It departs from extractivism, the historic mode of accumulation pursued by industrial centers to exploit natural resource-endowed countries, causing national economic distortions, destruction of nature, and dispossession of peoples' livelihoods (Acosta 2013). The "new" part has been adopted by progressive left governments, in contrast to neoliberal governments, as a new form of extractivism that still relies on natural resource extraction; yet it involves the participation of a sovereign state in the redistribution of extractive rents for social policies and infrastructure to achieve value-added industrialization and economic growth (Gudynas 2009; Arsel, Hogenboom, and Pellegrini 2016).

National sovereignty over extractive rents constitutes one of the most popular discourses of the PAIS Alliance (Dávalos and Albuja 2014). Certainly, the fiscal resources that were made available from high oil prices between 2010 and 2012, as well as bilateral loans along with the improved fiscal policy and administrative capacity of the state, allowed the Ecuadorian state to invest in public infrastructure and social programs (Larrea and Greene 2018). However, according to Larrea and Greene (2018), the concentration of land and capital remained extremely high despite PAIS Alliance's promise of productive matrix transformation and an 'agrarian revolution'. North and Grinspun (2016) argue that the new extractivism involves developmentalist policies that reinforce historic patterns of asset concentration while ignoring the transformative

potential of agrarian reforms for long-term poverty reduction. This is true for Ecuador, where extractivist projects are violently being imposed with increasing evidence of their negative consequences for the environment and rural livelihoods (Artacker 2018; Bravo 2020; Davidov 2013; Arsel 2012; Wilson and Bayón 2017) while the "social debt"[22] to the agrarian sector continues to be a reality for many.

A new area of research has emerged to analyse how the dynamics of new extractivism appears in the agrarian sector. With specific reference to Argentine soy production, Gudynas (2010) notes that external market demand has triggered an ongoing and massive geographical expansion and increasing production of capital- and input-intensive transgenic soy destined exclusively for export, with limited or no processing, few possibilities for capturing the soy export surplus, and scant opportunities for employment generation. In an attempt to distinguish such dynamics from previous processes of agrarian transformation, an emergent literature has started to deal with the constitutive characteristics of the new agrarian extractivism (Alonso-Fradejas 2018; Ezquerro-Cañete 2016; McKay 2017). In his study of the soy expansion promoted by a progressive government in Bolivia, McKay (2017) presents a new agrarian extractivism that involves massive volumes of raw materials that are exported with little or no processing and that, compared to other crops, concentrate more cultivated land and earn the greatest amount of export revenues. Moreover, only a few domestic and transnational companies concentrate control over the value chain, thus appropriating the surplus value generated in all activities that make up the soy chain. According to McKay (2017), all this results in the degradation of the environment due to unsustainable farming practices, and the deterioration of work opportunities and conditions.

New agrarian extractivism unfolds within rapid and profound transformations in the agriculture at a global level that has increased the demand for flex or multiple purpose crops and the profit of traditional and emergent agro-industrial capital (Borras Jr. et al. 2016; Gillon 2016). For Borras et al. (2016), "flex crops" refer to the capacity to vary a crop's multiple uses – food, agro-fuel, feed for animals, and other industrial applications, given the existing physical, technological and financial conditions of production. The land-use and crop-use changes associated with flex monocultures are

[22] Ecuadoreans refer to the "social debt" to point out the accumulated effects of cutbacks in social spending in the agrarian sector.

considered to be the primary driver of land and natural resource grabbing that have led to negative social and environmental effects (Borras Jr et al. 2012; Borras Jr. et al. 2016). Furthermore, the incorporation – and potential benefits (or harms) – of small-scale farmers as suppliers of raw materials in the flex crop value chain, remains an understudied area of scholarly research (Borras Jr. et al. 2016). In this regard, using an agrarian political economy perspective, White and Dasgupta (2010) propose to look at the conditions under which crops are produced and processed, and the actors who control the added value in the production and processing that convert the raw material into agro-fuels and other products. These are relevant aspects for a characterization of the new dynamics of agrarian extractivism in the Ecuadorian context.

Under the pretense of benefiting small-scale sugar cane associations from the agro-fuel policy, the Ecuadorian state implemented the *Agroenergía* program from 2013 to 2018. My research focuses on the associations in *Hacienda La Indiana* in the coastal Guayas province that acquired land under the state-sponsored land policy *Plan Tierras* and became part of the agrarian program *Agroenergía* to complement the higher demand of sugar cane for ethanol production. Following McKay (2017), this chapter analyzes the new extractive dynamics of the current sugar cane production in Guayas province and the inclusion of small-scale producer associations in developing the agro-fuel program *Ecopaís*. I contend that an extractive agro-fuel project is currently being implemented by the Ecuadorian state with a social inclusive component used to legitimize the oligopolistic power of sugar cane mills and their distilleries. Furthermore, I argue that, through public resources, the sugar cane mills and their distilleries control not only the production of sugar cane but the processing whereby this crop becomes ethanol and realises added value. This research adds to the recent literature on the extractive character of flex crop monocultures by offering new insights into the social-economic-ecological implications of including small-scale farmer associations, especially, the disproportionate impacts on women involved in an extractive and male-dominated dynamic.

The chapter is based on qualitative research conducted between September 2018 and August 2019. In addition to reviewing relevant existing data sources, I conducted 31 semi-structured individual interviews with actors who were directly or indirectly involved in the state agro-fuel program. The research participants included representatives of national peasant organizations, public sector officials, representatives of the private sector, small-scale alcohol producers, and agrarian experts. Among these

individuals, I interviewed seven women and nine men from four associations that acquired land in *Hacienda La Indiana*, who speak about their particular gender-differentiated experiences in sugar cane production.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into four sections. First, I provide a brief overview of the historical context of sugar cane production in Guayas. Second, I analyse the fundamental changes under which ethanol production is unfolding to facilitate the extraction of surplus value and extractive rent by the sugar cane mills and their distilleries. Third, I turn to an analysis of the integration of small-scale producer associations in the production of sugar cane through the *Agroenergía* program. In this part, I analyze the increasing economic dependency on agro-industrial inputs, the gendered division of labour, as well as the implications of a highly capital and external-input intensive agricultural model on nature, human health, and social reproduction. The last section provides a concluding discussion of my results.

2.2 From sugar cane to ethanol: a brief history of extraction

The sugar cane industry has a long history of influence in the capitalist development of Ecuador, shaping access to and control over land and production, as well as social conditions in the rural sector (Guerrero 1978). Although the origins of sugar cane production in the country can be traced to the 17th Century in the highlands, industrialization of sugar and alcohol production began only at the end of 19th Century in the coastal provinces (Fisher 1983). As documented by Guerrero (1978), the industry was initially directly linked to the cocoa boom in the coastal provinces of Guayas and Los Ríos, for it was the hegemonic class of cocoa agro-exporters and its related banking bourgeoisie with political influence that started investing in sugar cane production. The cocoa boom period (1840-1910) had led to the concentration of the most productive coastal lands, acquired through economic and violent mechanisms such as the acquisition of confiscated properties in mortgage default, forced purchase of land below market prices, and land grabbing from peasants and indigenous communities that did not have formal land titles (Maiguashca 2012). During the first decades of the 20th Century, the *Banco Comercial y Agrícola,* former owner of San Carlos sugar cane mill, started to expand its investments in modern machinery for sugar cane production, benefiting from cheap labour and the then high international price of sugar (Guerrero 1978, 2017).

In his analysis of the sugar cane mills during 1900-1954, Guerrero (1978) documents that in the 1950s only two sugar cane mills, San Carlos and Valdéz, successfully consolidated their market positions by appropriating capital from the exploitation of the labour force and the acquisition of large tracts of land from small-scale sugar cane mills that were not able to compete in the market. A process of proletarianization ensued as peasant tenants were evicted from the haciendas of cocoa producers that fell into bankruptcy and were bought by the large sugar cane mills. For the most part, the displaced coastal peasants and indigenous people from the highlands, who were hired as permanent or temporary sugar cane workers, were men, since there is no record of the presence of female workers in the sugar cane plantations (Flórez 2011). Guerrero (1978) documents monopolistic market practices, such as planned restrictions of sugar production to generate shortages, speculation and price increases, along with media campaigns, all of which facilitated control of the market by the San Carlos and Valdéz sugar cane mills. Under these conditions, sugar cane became the most important export product during the 1960s and mid-1970s, after the banana crisis and before the oil boom started in the 1970s. This momentum prompted the former military government (1963-1969) to nationalize two major sugar cane mills, TAINA and AZTRA (*Azucarera Tropicana Americana*) (Fisher 1983).

The 1960s was also a period characterized by violence against sugar cane workers (Harari et al. 2012) and the increased influence of agro-industrial enterprises in agrarian and land policies and institutions. In that regard, North (1985) argued that the political and economic influence of the dominant capitalist class of the coast – that includes sugar cane mill owners – was a determining factor in undermining the potentially democratizing impacts of the agrarian reforms that were pursued by military governments in the 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time, the Ecuadorian state made resources available for the modernization of these powerful agro-industrial groups that benefited from public policies at the expense of peasant livelihoods (North 1985). For Flórez (2011), these policies were crucial for stabilizing the position of the most powerful sugar cane mills in the national economy. During the 1990s, neoliberal agrarian policies and a deregulated land market exacerbated the existing high level of land and market concentration in the hands of rural elites and shaped the agrarian structure for years to come. Indeed, in the last decades of the 20th century these were the conditions that consolidated an oligopoly, where the three most prominent sugar

cane mills San Carlos, Valdéz, and Coazúcar (formerly AZTRA) had the capacity to influence over the market of sugar cane (Nicolalde Herrera 2014).

The next section examines how the oligopolistic sugar cane mills managed to gain control over the ethanol production fostered by PAIS Alliance *Ecopaís* program.

2.3 Setting new rules for ethanol extraction under PAIS Alliance

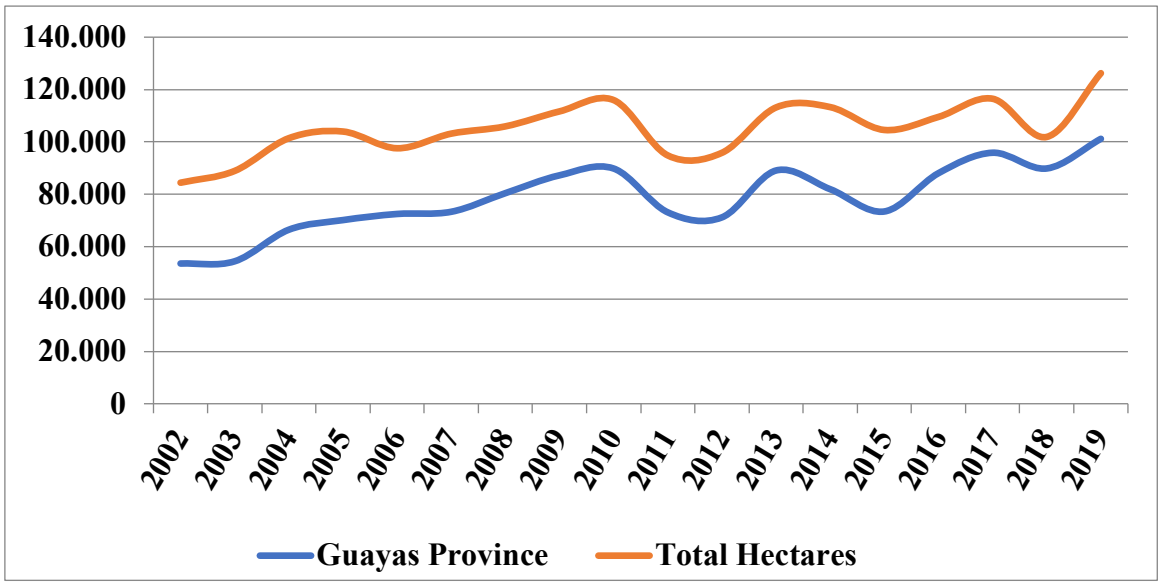
Three distilleries Soderal, Codana, and Producargo, owned by the three largest mills San Carlos, Valdéz, and Coazúcar[23], were established at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s for the recycling of molasses from the residue of sugar cane processing. Initially, molasses was used exclusively for ethyl alcohol production destined for the alcohol, pharmacological, and cosmetology markets. With new technological advances, the oligopolistic sugar mills and their distilleries expanded their product portfolio; in the early 2000s, they began distilling anhydrous ethanol to supply the chemical industry. With the beginning of the *Ecopaís* program in 2010, Soderal, Codana, and Producargo started producing anhydrous ethanol to supply EP-Petroecuador, the public enterprise in charge of the production of sugar cane agro-fuel and its distribution and commercialization in the national petroleum market. Until 2013, the agro-fuel *Ecopaís* contained 5% sugar-cane base ethanol and was distributed only in Guayaquil and Durán. In subsequent years, the *Ecopaís* program was expanded to other cantons in the Guayas province. As of 2015, the blend mandate of *Ecopaís* was supposed to increase up to 10% ethanol and to be progressively distributed throughout the country, depending on the ethanol supply (Ordóñez Saénz 2016).

The *Ecopaís* program has expanded the sugar cane land frontier, especially in Guayas province. As shown in Figure 1, although the cultivated area of sugar cane has fluctuated during the last eighteen years, it has increased significantly compared to the first decade of the new century when agro-fuels were first declared of national interest. According to the National Statistic and Census Institute (INEC 2020), sugar cane production, along with palm oil and bananas, occupy the largest extensions of land in the country. Figure 1 also shows that it is in Guayas that the cultivated area doubled. While the cultivated sugar cane area increased from 84,420 hectares to 126,000 hectares during 2002-2019, sugar cane production increased from 5 million metric tonnes (MT)

[23] Three other mills, IANCEM, Monterrey, and Isabel María, do not have a significant sugar cane production (Figueroa De La Vega 2008).

to more than 9 million MT during the same period. Today, INEC calculates that the coastal province of Guayas produces 80% of Ecuador's sugar cane and allocates 90% of its cultivated land area to this flex crop. Indeed, the apparent stability of this agro-industrial sector, as well as government incentives for agro-fuel production, according to a sugar cane expert, expanded the sugar cane land frontier and brought new small and medium-scale sugar cane producers into the sector (interview with Francisco Alemán, Guayaquil, July 1, 2019).

Figure 2. 1 Sugar cane cultivated area in hectares (2002-2019)



Prepared by the author from data compiled by the National Statistic and Census Institute (INEC).

Cultivated sugar cane land and new producers promoted by the *Ecopaís* program, however, has not altered the concentrated ownership of land, which remains mostly in the hands of the largest sugar cane mills, San Carlos, Valdéz and Coazúcar. Indeed, the National Agricultural Census (2000) documented that the high levels of land concentration in Guayas are directly linked to the production of sugar cane. The census also reveals that the districts where the three most prominent sugar cane mills —San Carlos, Valdez, and Coazúcar[24]— are located are among those with the highest levels of land concentration in the country. Even though there are no recent official data available on the concentration of land in the hands of the three largest sugar cane mills, it is estimated that in 2008 they owned around 57,000 hectares, which represents 55% of the

[24] Other three mills, IANCEM, Monterrey and Isabel María, do not have a significant sugar cane production (Figueroa De La Vega 2008).

total hectares used for the production of sugar cane (Figueroa De La Vega 2008). Small-and-medium scale sugar cane producers from surrounding areas supply the remainder of the sugar cane production to the mills. Sugar cane mills and their distilleries continue to appropriate surplus value derived from their land as well as from the increased production volume on the new cultivated land of small-and middle-scale producers who supply them with sugar cane.

Sugar cane mills and their distilleries appropriate surplus value from sugar cane as they continue to benefit from the historic levels of labour precariousness in their operations in Guayas. Since most of sugar cane production by the main mills is harvested mechanically (Centro de investigación de la caña de azúcar del Ecuador 2019), employment in the sector and the region has been reduced significantly, affecting the *zafreros* or cane cutters in particular. Much of the field labour is now performed mainly by foreign workers (primarily from Venezuela and Peru), who are paid less than Ecuadorians and are outsourced, that is, they do not have formal labour relations with the sugar cane mills (interview with Ángel Rivero, Guayaquil, December 26, 2018). Despite labour regulations introduced by the PAIS-Alliance government, the precariousness of the labour force persists in new forms of subcontracting that allow sugar cane mills to lower labour costs and increase their profits without making major investments (Harari et al. 2012). In 2017, 14,450 workers were involved in the production of sugar cane, half of them casual and informal workers according to the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG 2017). The same source reveals that only 12% of the workers were women, confirming that work related to the production of sugar cane is male-dominated. However, it is not only the appropriation of the increased production volume and the surplus value derived from historic levels of land concentration and labour precariousness that stand out in the contemporary extractive production of sugar cane for ethanol in Guayas.

As mentioned earlier, the political and economic influence of the dominant capitalist agrarian elite of the coast has historically directed the benefits of public policies in favour of their interests (North 1985). To defend their interests in a more effective fashion, the main sugar cane mills established the Alcohol Producers Association of Ecuador (APALE) in 2005, also known as the Association of Bio-fuels of Ecuador. As a representative of APALE explains:

> [APALE] was created to bring together all these producers, especially the industrial ones that, we can say, are the most organized. It would be utopian to

> say that we are going to unite all the cane producers that have one, two, three, four, or five hectares as to unite the three [sugar cane mills] that have hundreds of hectares.[25] So, it was the idea of the largest industries to establish this association [APALE]… The association became stronger when [former president] Correa began his program for creating biofuels, ... it could be said that he was this man who started this [the production of agro-fuels] or who demanded that this should start working… The objective [of APALE] was to protect the interests of the industry within the country. The living example of this [objective] is to look at how APALE is operating in the current situation on biofuels [see below] … What APALE basically has to do is to remove the blindfold off the government's eyes regarding biofuels, [it is] as simple as that. (Interview with Carlos León, Guayaquil, January 21, 2019)

As León clearly states, the support of the PAIS Alliance government under the leadership of Rafael Correa (2007-2017) and the ability of the APALE to advocate for the sugar cane mill interests were crucial for the implementation of the *Ecopaís* program. PAIS Alliance support becomes even more evident when we look into the 2015 visit of former vice president Jorge Glas[26] to the Soderal distillery, owned by the San Carlos sugar cane mill. Emphasizing the innovative potential of the sugar cane industry, the vice president asserts that "we are sowing gasoline and if we are sowing gasoline that is friendly to the environment, then we are generating jobs. The public and private sectors must go hand in hand to generate more employment and wealth" (Sociedad Agrícola e Industrial San Carlos S.A. 2015). When referring to state support for all sugar cane related industries in this economic group, the head of the San Carlos board, Mariano González, responded to the visit by saying:

> Thanks to the incentives that were created in Ecuador by this government, San Carlos has invested 200 million [US] dollars. The cardboard and paper industry 45 million [US] dollars. The alcohol industry is currently investing 12 million [US] dollars. And I am referring to the investments made in the course of this government. We wanted to tell you, and for this reason we greatly appreciate your presence here, that we fully identified with the projects implemented by your government. (Ingenio San Carlos 2015)[27]

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[25] However, APALE claims in its website to represent all the actors involved in the agro-fuels sector – i.e. sugar cane producers, artisan alcohol producers, sugar cane mills, and sugar cane workers. Information retrieved from the APALE website (www.apale.org) on February 20, 2020.

[26] Former vice-president (2013-2017) Jorge Glass was one of the foremost proponents of the productive matrix transformation promoted by PAIS Alliance. In 2017, he was suspended from his official duties and sentenced to six years in prison for receiving bribes from the Brazilian company Odebrecht.

[27] The full intervention of Mariano González on October 15, 2015 was retrieved on August 1, 2019 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DOTx_sYz0A

As recognized by the San Carlos board head, the incentives created by the former PAIS Alliance government encouraged the sugar cane mills and their distilleries to expand their processing facilities for ethanol, among other industries of their ownership. There were essentially two kinds of incentives provided by the state. First, through Executive Decree 675 of May 2015, a new ethanol price was set to match the US Gulf coast price index published by the agency Argus.[28] Although the price depends on the daily ethanol average pricing determined by Argus, the government guarantees the distilleries a "floor" price of US $0.90 cents per litre. Earlier, ethanol prices had depended on decreasing international sugar prices. Second, both distilleries Codana and Soderal signed investment agreements of US $7 million and US $12 million, respectively, with the Ministry for Industry and Productivity (MIPRO),[29] the institution that coordinates the implementation of the *Ecopaís* Program. As a result of this public-private partnership arrangement, in 2016 Codana and Soderal doubled their ethanol processing capacity from its previous level, from 34.65 million litres to 74.45 million litres per year. Furthermore, in 2016, the combined total private and public investment of US $350 million was an important contribution to the implementation of the *Ecopaís* Program (Ordóñez Saénz 2016). These incentives clearly demonstrate the ways in which the distilleries appropriated public resources to control the processing process of ethanol.

As for the capacity to influence politics, this becomes evident in the dispute between APALE and the Ministry of Hydrocarbons around ethanol prices triggered by the economic crisis that burst onto the political scene in 2016. During the third mandate of the PAIS Alliance government under Lenin Moreno (2017-2021), potential investments totalling US $460 million to the sugar cane industry were projected. However, neither new investments nor previous agreements with APALE and *EP-Petroecuador* were renewed immediately in 2018 due to the opposition of the Ministry of Hydrocarbons against the *Ecopaís* policy. In fact, there was opposition to *Ecopaís* from the entire petrochemical sector, including state institutions that are interested in ensuring their main source of income, namely petroleum-derived fuel (GAIN 2018).

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[28] Argus is an agency that publishes global energy and commodity news and price reporting. It offers an ethanol assessment, which is published daily and is the basis to calculate the ethanol price paid to the distilleries.

[29] Before the organizational restructuring of PAIS Alliance government under Lenin Moreno, this ministry was the Coordination Ministry of Production, Employment and Competitiveness.

While this may be the case, opposition to *Ecopaís* also needs to be considered in light of the government's austerity policies that questioned the feasibility of maintaining subsidized gasoline prices, including the *Ecopaís* price.[30] More importantly, the Ministry of Hydrocarbons' attempt to reduce the ethanol floor price of US $0.90 cents paid to the distilleries, due to the economic losses this represents for the state, was the most contentious issue between this institution and APALE.

On the one hand, the government complained that the price paid to the distilleries was significantly higher than the cost of importing ethanol while the poor production capacity of the distilleries had reduced the actual blend of ethanol in *Ecopaís* (España 2018). Certainly, the Ministry of Hydrocarbons' critique suggests inefficiency in the production of ethanol. On the other hand, according to the APALE, the ethanol floor price corresponded to the production costs of the distilleries for producing a litre of ethanol (interview with Carlos León, Guayaquil, January 21, 2019). The conflict between the Ministry of Hydrocarbons and the distilleries took place without public disclosure of the official information about the real production costs of the distilleries nor of the benefits of producing agro-fuels for the state. However, representatives of APALE pursued a strong lobby effort to stress savings to the state from reducing currency outflows for imports of high-octane gasoline, from job generation, and from environmental benefits. This included an International Conference on Ecuadorian Agrofuels, organized in April 2019 together with the former Minister of Agriculture, Xavier Lazo and the vice-president, Otto Sonnenholzner, to further promote agro-fuels under the discourse of rural development and diversification of the energy matrix (Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería 2019; Vicepresidencia de la República del Ecuador 2019). Ultimately, agreements between APALE and *EP-Petroecuador* were renewed in 2019 at the controversial ethanol price of US $0.90, despite lower prices in the international market (*El Comercio* 2019).[31]

[30] Although gasoline prices (Extra and *Ecopaís*) were adjusted in December 2018, it was in October 2019 when, under the conditionalities set by an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, the PAIS Alliance government fully eliminated the price subsidies for gasoline, including *Ecopaís*. Widespread social protest and unrest were determining factors that forced the government to rescind this measure.

[31] More recently, the Ecuadorian government under the lead of President Guillermo Lasso has announced an increase in the ethanol blend and an expansion in the geographical coverage of *Ecopaís* (GAIN 2022).

The contemporary extractive production of sugar cane for ethanol today also encompasses a social component that includes alcohol and sugar cane producer associations into the *Ecopaís* program. In fact, insignificant employment generation through the expansion of processing facilities was acknowledged by MIPRO (Mendieta 2019). Thus, as a way to compensate for this situation, MIPRO demanded that the distilleries buy artisanal alcohol produced by small-scale associations from the highland provinces at a price of US $1.04 per litre, and at the level of 4% of the total amount they provide to EP-*Petroecuador*.[32] For the distilleries, the associations provide a low-quality alcohol that represents an extra cost of US $0.04 cents per litre in ethanol processing. However, as the distilleries recognize, it is the economies of scale that make ethanol production a profitable business for them (interview with Emilio Oneto, Milagro, June 28, 2019). For the small-scale alcohol producers, the low quota of artisanal alcohol assigned to them, the lack of adequate technology to produce high-quality alcohol, and recent regulations for alcohol imports, are all reasons to doubt the sustainability of this social inclusion component (interview with Francisco Guerrón, Quito, August 27, 2019).

Below, I continue to discuss the extractive nature of ethanol production as I analyse the social inclusion component of the *Ecopaís* program through the integration of the small-scale sugar cane producer associations of *Hacienda La Indiana* in ethanol production.

2.4 Examining the integration of small-scale producers into the ethanol production

Hacienda La Indiana is a 1,400-hectare rural estate in the parish of Puerto Inca, in the province of Guayas. The hacienda was seized from the Isaías Group, a business conglomerate led by the Isaías brothers, who were held responsible for the country's financial meltdown in the late 1990s due to the corrupt practices of their banks. Since 2007, landless people from neighbouring parishes and "rural cities" such as Milagro, as well as from more distant sites, such as peri-urban villages of Guayaquil, the rice producing zone of Salitre, and the highland rural areas in Azuay province, took possession of the hacienda, motivated by the PAIS Alliance government's promise of

[32] In 2019, MIPRO allocated a quota to 14 associations that generated direct employment for approximately 2,600 people (Mendieta 2019).

land distribution. As in other rural states that were seized from this powerful economic group, *Hacienda La Indiana* was the site of a violent confrontation between the landless groups and individuals linked to the Isaías Group, i.e. the former hacienda administrator and a neighbouring banana plantation owner. The violence included evictions, destruction of properties, such as provisional shelters and food cultivation plots, as well as the assassination of the former secretary of the association *La Indiana* (Ericsson 2013). Ramona, a member of the association *La Indiana* recalls:

> The truth is that everything happened here… exactly when I was here one day, one of these machines came. There were little cane houses [here] that some had built recently. Everything was trashed. We ran to grab the little sheets of zinc [roofing] but the machine came back, that *trucutú*, and cut them into little pieces so that they would no longer be used to rebuild houses. They left us with nothing. They destroyed all the little houses. We had cultivated herbs and food plants. All…, all this was terrible … They did all those evil things. They killed our *compañero*, they persecuted us, they threatened they would come to kill us. After they killed our *compañero*, [the crime] went to trial, and the authorities were made aware of it, and then it seems that they stopped the threats. Then, this [estate] passed into the hands of the state. So, they let us work in peace. It was when the president [Rafael Correa] himself came here to deliver the title that we had a little more peace, tranquillity. We were no longer living under the shadows. (Interview with Ramona Macías, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 3, 2019)

In 2011, through the *Plan Tierras,* four associations – *27 de Octubre, Buen Vivir, La Indiana*, and *Arroceros de Cone* – acquired *Hacienda La Indiana* to produce sugar cane. The political support lent by two national peasant organizations, FENACLE and FEI, to PAIS Alliance and especially to Rafael Correa and the party's agrarian project, was certainly decisive for the four associations to expect benefits from this public policy (Ericsson 2013). In accordance with the constitutional principles of gender equality that influenced the development of policies within the Ministry of Agriculture during the Correa administration, *Plan Tierras* required the incorporation of at least 30% female membership in producer associations. Table 1 shows the current gender composition of the associations in *Hacienda La Indiana*. Today all but one of the four have a female membership of nearly or over 30%. Also, by acquiring the hacienda in 2011, the associations, composed of 250 individuals in total, were initially granted a single associative title. This was intended to promote an associative model, i.e. the pooling of female and male members' economic revenues through joint cultivation of sugar cane, aimed to guarantee payments on the mortgage taken out through the *Plan Tierras* while supplying the increasing demand for sugar cane needed for agro-fuels production (Ericsson 2013).

Table 2. 1 Membership in the associations of *Hacienda La Indiana*

Associations	Total Members	Women	Men	% Women
Buen Vivir	38	12	26	32
27 de Octubre	51	6	45	12
Coop. La Indiana	115	45	70	39
Arroceros de Cone	46	13	33	28
Total	250	76	174	30

Source: Interviews with the associations in *Hacienda La Indiana*

Indeed, two years after *Hacienda La Indiana* was associatively acquired, the national program *Agroenergía* was officially launched in this rural estate. *Agroenergía*, complementary to *Ecopaís,* was a program pursued by the Ministry of Agriculture from 2013 to 2018. Its overall objective was to increase the land under sugar cane production annually by 10 thousand hectares annually, to reach 83 thousand hectares, and increase sugar cane production to 800 million litres of ethanol by 2020 (*Diario El Telégrafo* 2013). *Agroenergía* included an agreement of joint implementation, in which the Ministry of Agriculture committed itself to provide agricultural inputs and technical support while the associations in *Hacienda La Indiana* were responsible for the production of cane seedlings that would be transplanted elsewhere. The goal of making *Hacienda La Indiana* into a "*semillero de caña*" – the seedbed for the provision of sugar cane for the production of agro-fuels – raised expectations that 250 men and women would not only have access to land, but that they would also receive technical support and a guaranteed market from the state. Franklin from the association *27 de Octubre*, who was a former labour force contractor in *Hacienda La Indiana* before *Plan Tierras*, explains:

> Initially, the farm had approximately 750 hectares of sugar cane. But they were already eight, or ten-year-old cane stalks. So, there was this national *Agroenergía* program. They contacted me to map out the area that had been in production for too long and had [suffered from] no maintenance. The total productive area had dropped to about 400 hectares. So, I planted about 300 hectares with the *Agroenergía* project, and the farm again had about 650 hectares of total productive land. Practically, 50% of the hacienda was planted [through *Agroenergía*]. (Interview with Franklin Martínez, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 21, 2019)

Certainly, the inclusion of peasant associations in sugar cane production under an associative model, along with the possibility of starting a state-led process capable of

creating employment and value-added industrialization, was an innovative initiative. However, the limited scope of *Agroenergía* made this program go unnoticed by many association members who did not know of its existence, even less of the alleged benefits it could bring them, apart from the renewal of sugar cane seeds. In fact, the shortcomings of the program were already notorious by 2015 when the cane seedlings could not be transplanted elsewhere due to lack of new available fields (interview with SC, Guayaquil, January 28, 2019). Furthermore, the government did not invest in the creation of a public sugar cane mill, a premise of this public program that would have absorbed the increased production of sugar cane (interview with SC, Guayaquil, January 28, 2019). Under these circumstances, the Ministry of Agriculture ultimately asked the neighbouring sugar cane mill, Coazúcar, to establish a single harvest contract with all four associations.

For almost three years since *Hacienda La Indiana* was acquired, sugar cane production was associatively managed by the four associations. A legal representative of each of the four and an external administrator appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture were in charge of sugar cane management in the hacienda. Nonetheless, this associative management generated distress between the association members, as Wilman, from *La Indiana* association, states:

> We did not accept that the *Buen Vivir* association, with 38 members, was going to have a quarter of the land, approximately 325 hectares. That was 9 hectares [per member]. And we, as *La Indiana* association, with 115 members, were only going to have approximately 2.57 hectares.
> In the beginning, we chose our leaders. The only one who was appointed by the Ministry was the administrator, who at that time was the engineer Javier Burgos. He was the principal head.
> Perhaps our former leader, Mr. Maldonado, did not intend to harm us. Perhaps he did it with the intention of acquiring the land and solving problems along the way. We trusted our leader because, after all, he was a person who offered his life [for the land]. But afterwards, we realized that he was no longer fighting for us.
> Since 2012, the money from cane production was divided into four equal parts. The three associations that were members of FENACLE delivered a bonus to their people. However, we did not receive anything. We do not know what kind of a deal was made among the leaders. We have no records to prove that our leaders received a quarter of the profits. (Interview with Wilman Sarango, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 1, 2019)

The quote above describes the environment of distrust felt by some associates about the amount of land assigned to some associations, and the apparent misuse of sugar cane earnings by the persons who occupied leading positions under the top-down

associative management of sugar cane production. This conflict led to the *de facto* division of the hacienda land that took into consideration the number of members and functioned under a new elected leadership. Furthermore, the associations demanded the legal *singularización* the division of the land title into four legal documents that they received from the Ministry of Agriculture in 2019. With the fragmentation of the hacienda, every association became responsible for the management of their assigned plots of land. This re-shaped the productive landscape of the hacienda since some associations allowed their members to make their own decisions about land use while others continued to cultivate sugar cane. For instance, a significant number of the association members in *La Indiana* decided to switch to other cash crops, cacao most importantly. Despite this crop diversification, most of the land continue to be cultivated, associatively or individually, with sugar cane that is sold to the sugar cane mill Coazúcar.

The maintenance work in the sugar cane fields includes activities that require physical strength and are undertaken in the early hours of the morning during the annual season that stretches from May to December. In fact, the cultivation of sugar cane is well known for its strenuous work that includes soil preparation, removal of the weed called *cauca*, the cleaning of irrigation canals, application of fertilizers, irrigation, and fumigation with herbicides. Prior to manual cane cutting and harvesting comes the *desoje*, whereby workers with *machete* in hand remove the dry leaves to permit the burning of the sugar cane fields. The sugar cane mill Coazúcar is responsible for the harvesting, i.e. it hires workers from outside the association to cut and transport the cane. While some association members have years of experience in sugar cane production due to their previous work in the mills, others learned about it only with the acquisition of the hacienda. Wilman, is one of the few members from *the Indiana* association, who produces sugar cane individually. He explains:

> It is a hard job, but the good thing about sugar cane is that during the entire season —from the beginning to the harvest— on a five-hectare plot of land, there are approximately ninety days of work. That's the good thing about sugar cane. It does not involve a lot of work time. Here, we have *compañeros* who work by themselves, there are others who contract [labor] for one or two days a week until the harvest is done. (Interview with Wilman Sarango, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 1, 2019)

Luciano, who was a former sugar cane cutter in Valdez mill, describes how it is to be both a member and a worker of the *Buen Vivir* association that manages the production of sugar cane associatively:

> When we are very busy with the weeds, we would hire workers from outside. As long as we are up to date, we do not contract them because we can maintain the sugar cane by ourselves. The administrator is the one who manages the resources. I tell him: "Sir, I need one thousand bags of urea" and he has to give me the thousand bags; "I need so much herbicide", and he has to give it to me. The income from the harvest stays in the association's chest; the money stays there to be spent for investing in the next harvest. (Interview with Luciano Briones, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019)

Franklin, the experienced sugar cane member of the *27 de Octubre* association, clarifies the working conditions of sugar cane workers:

> Their daily wage fluctuates between 19.70 [US] dollars, up to 21 and 24 [US] dollars. The work can be paid in advance or [by completed] task. But there is other work that is paid by day. In this way, the *compañero* can earn his day and get his basic monthly salary. (Interview with Franklin Martínez, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 21, 2019)

These two testimonies describe the working conditions for members who engage in the maintenance work in *Hacienda La Indiana*. Notably, instead of a collective form of production where all association members work together, the associative model resembles the organizational form of a private company. Members of the association hire the administrator who is the person responsible for managing the seasonal production and financial resources, and for hiring labour, mainly the few members who live in the hacienda and have some work experience in sugar cane, to undertake the hard-physical maintenance work of the crop. For instance, in the association *27 de Octubre,* from 6 to 8 out of 51 members work on the 180 hectares in associative production of sugar cane. Luciano, a member of association *27 de Octubre*, puts it simply, "what we earned [from the annual sugar cane harvest], we invested here… and what little is left is given to the *compañeros* at the end of the year, a small remuneration, an *agasajo* [Christmas' party] or something like that" (interview with Luciano Briones, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019). FV, from the same association, complements "all the members expect from the administration to organize the maintenance work. We wait for something to be shared at the end of the year" (interview with FV, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019). Thus, the organizational form, associatively or individually, determines the relation of members to their land, and this has important implications on

how they understand their participation within the extractivist logic of the sugar cane market.

The next section explores further the integration within this corporate-controlled production model, focussing on the economic, gender, and environmental implications of this new agro-extractive dynamic.

2.4.1 Increasing economic dependency on sugar cane mills and agri-bussiness

The cost structure of sugar cane production shows the economic constraints that small-scale sugar cane producers face within this extractive model of production. Seeds make up an important part of the costs for sugar cane producers, especially during the first planting season. As mentioned before, in 2013 the *Agroenergía* program provided funding to replace the old stalks on some areas of the hacienda. However, some associations have not been able to afford the replanting of old stalks that need to be replaced every three to five years. The lack of financial resources to reseed the fields was a recurrent concern for the *Buen Vivir* association, as Georgina puts it:

> First of all, the land has to be plowed, and then furrows have to be made. This means making little ditches to plant the cane seeds. Two pieces are planted so that the sugar cane can sprout well, one or two, depending on the size of the seed. Seeds refer to pieces of cane, pieces that have been cut from the cane stalk. Once planted, we proceed to cover it with soil using the *hampa*, a hoe… Then we irrigate the plant so that the sugar cane can sprout. I learned how to handle the sugar cane here. We have seeds here. But the seeds here are no longer any good, so we need to buy them from other places that have good seeds. We need money to buy the seeds. (Interview with Georgina Rosso, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 23, 2019)

JSB, another member of this association, mentions how this problem has led to decreasing yields for the association:

> Sugar cane is no longer profitable because the planted fields are old. They are about nine, ten years old now. Cane fields need to be renewed every three years. I know it from engineers and friends with whom I used to work at the sugar cane mill Valdez. There, every three years they plant new sugar cane, and that is how they keep harvesting up to eighty, ninety tons. But here we take forty, fifty tons and that is not profitable… you will lose. (Interview with JSB, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 23, 2019)

The problem exposed by Georgina and JSB hints at something more troubling. As a representative from the National Union of Sugar Cane Producers of Ecuador Sugar explained to me, sugar cane producers who supply the three main sugar cane mills are becoming increasingly dependent on the certified seed varieties produced by these same

mills (interview with Ángel López, Guayaquil, June 24, 2019). Indeed, during the last decade, different varieties of domestically certified seeds have been developed by the centre for sugar cane research (Centro de investigación de la caña de azúcar del Ecuador 2019) sponsored by the sugar cane mills. The introduction of domestic seed varieties in the sugar cane market was intended to replace the Ragnar seed varieties imported from other countries while guaranteeing the availability of seeds to the sugar cane mills for their own production and commercial activities (*Diario El Telégrafo* 2011).[33] While wealthier sugar cane producers can afford to buy certified seeds directly from the mills, small-scale associations like in *Hacienda La Indiana* will likely enter into relations of debt and dependency with the sugar cane mills that have the control over the sugar cane seed production.

The increasing dependency on agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers and herbicides, sold by commercial outlets owned by nine agribusiness that concentrate the national market of agricultural inputs, are another concern for associations members. Ángel of *27 de Octubre* expresses his concern as "the prices of products such as fertilizers, herbicides, go up more and more. In the month of February, the urea was at twenty dollars, and right now [May] it is at twenty-two" (interview with Ángel Ortega, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 21, 2019). According to the Ministry of Agriculture (2016), fertilizer import quantities have doubled since the early 2000s. Similarly, Naranjo (2017) reports a progressive increase in pesticide imports from China and Colombia, especially since the implementation of the productive matrix transformation in 2013, that included the promotion of agro-fuels production. The costs of agricultural inputs for sugar cane is covered by the associations that work associatively and invest the revenues from the previous year, while members who work individually, for the most part, need to apply for credits to public financial institutions to buy them. Luciano Briones states, "Miss, urea goes up, inputs go up, everything goes up. Look Miss, [the price of] gasoline has risen and is about to rise again. And instead of raising [the price of the products] that we harvest in the field, what they [the government and sugar cane mills] do is lower the price. Instead of maintaining the price, they lower it" (interview Luciano Briones, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019).

[33] There is another research center financed by the National Union of Sugar Cane Producers of Ecuador, but its seed production capacities are not significant.

The last quotation refers to the Ministry of Agriculture's decision to reduce the sugar cane price in 2019 (Ministerial Agreement No. 131 of July 29, 2019). This was in response to the multiple efforts of the sugar cane mills to lower the costs of the raw material, roughly half of which is supplied by independent sugar cane producers. Before this ministerial decision, a minimum price support policy existed for sugar cane and other agricultural products – a policy that was implemented during the previous government of PAIS Alliance, headed by former president Correa. The minimum price aimed to stabilize the sugar cane sector while galvanizing political support from the National Union of Sugar Cane Producers of Ecuador. However, this price support hid important problems in the cost structure of sugar cane production (interview with Rafael Guerrero, Guayaquil, November 21, 2019), some of which I have described above. Furthermore, due to an apparent crisis in the sugar market,[34] the three sugar cane mills declared insolvency right after the 2018 harvest and, as a consequence, they did not pay their providers. This violated existing agreements between the sugar cane producers, the state, and the private sector. Ultimately, this meant that all associations, regardless of its form of organization, could not recover their investments and did not have the financial resources to begin the 2019 harvest season. Luciano, from the *27 de Octubre* association, puts it:

> Where will we end up this year if the ton price [of sugar cane] is lowered, at the price that we have bought fertilizers, herbicides? If we had gotten a loan from the bank, how would we have paid for that investment if prices fell? We would go bankrupt. But we here [in the *27 de Octubre* association], thank God, have no debt. We have invested the same resources that have come out of our production. They [the sugar cane mills] said, those who want to work with us accept our conditions or they don't go anywhere. They already arbitrarily charged us a fine for the trash;[35] they did not put this in consideration and what they wanted to do, they did. And now they want to lower the price per ton of sugar cane. (Interview Luciano Briones, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019)

[34] According to the Global Agricultural Information Network (2019), fiscal policy decisions, the global surplus of sugar, and its resulting falling international price, have affected the internal sugar market. However, more research is needed to understand the real effects of this crisis on the sugar cane mills given the state protectionist measures that cover their competitive disadvantages in the sugar market, especially in the Andean Community of Nations.

[35] This is a common practice of sugar cane mills that consist of a fine charged for what they consider to be low quality product and that rest the profits of sugar cane producers.

As suggested by a number of my participants in the above interview quotes, despite the formal access to land granted to the producer associations, the sugar cane mills ultimately exercise control over land *vis-à-vis* their influence over the terms of production and control of agricultural inputs. The oligopolistic conditions under which this extractive model operates allow the sugar cane mills and their distilleries to determine the input prices, directly influencing the production cost structure of sugar cane providers. Through the farming contracts facilitated by the *Agroenergía* program, the sugar cane mill, Coazúcar, can squeeze the four associations into a clearly dependent and very vulnerable position as the mills continue to exercise political influence on public institutions. All of this is putting at risk the livelihoods of small producers, especially those producing individually who struggle to pay their bank loans and maintain their access to land. However, it is not only the production value but the processing through which the sugar cane realises added value in different forms that is appropriated by the sugar cane mills and related companies. As Ángel Ortega, member of the *27 de Octubre* Association clearly puts it, "they [the sugar cane mills] argue that they don't have money [to pay the associations] and they will continue with that story every year. But they have the value-added, they have the energy [agro-fuels], they have the cardboard, the paper. So, they don't only extract sugar from the cane" (interview with Ángel Ortega, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 21, 2019).

2.4.2 Exacerbating the gendered division of labour and the burden on women

While interviewing association members, different perceptions about the engagement of women in the hard physical labour demanded in the maintenance of sugar cane becomes evident. Some members referred to the first years in the hacienda as the moment of greatest participation by women in the maintenance work of sugar cane. JSB, from *Buen Vivir*, recalls when he was supporting the administrators with the hiring of labour force:

> At that time, I met a *paisanita* [an Indigenous women from the highlands]. She used to come with two others to work here and earned the same as men. There were also women members who worked here. They were given a task like anyone else. We told them, "we are going to pay you for eight or ten trips. You decide how you want to go about it. [If you complete your work] in three, two hours, that's your problem, but you're going to clear the ground around the sugar cane". If the work was easy, they completed around ten in the morning. Those women could do the hard work [of sugar cane production]. (Interview with JSB, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 23, 2019)

Kleber from *La Indiana* association highlights the outstanding strength of young women who at that time engaged in this physically demanding task:

> When the property was administered by the four associations, the women also cleared the sugar cane... Mrs. María and that other woman had a good machete, I can tell you. During the seeding of sugar cane, women irrigated, which is an easy task. Men watered or the women watered. But when the women picked up the weeder, they would 'defeat us'. These black women here, the other women too, they are *unas muchachonas* [as strong as young men]. They were strong as they worked the land. The daughters of the members came to help, their sons too. (Interview with Kleber Bustamante, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 2, 2019)

Ángel from the association *27 de Octubre* also refers to the years when the four associations managed the hacienda together:

> There are women who do work removing weeds, fertilizing, and there is no difference with men. The woman who wanted to work, worked. However, today, most *compañeras* do not work directly in the fields, as they did in the beginning. At that time, the *compañeras* were in the fields, and those who weren't in the fields were in food preparation. That was when the hacienda was taken over in 2011 and until the second half of 2015 when the fight for singularization [dividing plots among associations] began. (Interview with Ángel Ortega, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 21, 2019)

Today, no women are hired to undertake the maintenance work of sugar cane in the association *27 de Octubre* as in previous years. Franklin explained to me that this had to do with the goal of the association to work more efficiently. He continues, "before [the singularization], it was easier [to hire a woman] because there was more land, thus, a greater amount of work. But now, how can you expect a woman to carry an entire bag of fertilizer, I mean, it's an inherently masculine job" (interview Franklin Martínez, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 21, 2019). Another member from the same association, Luciano, continues:

> It's not a task for them. I think that the maintenance work of sugar cane, such as fumigating, weeding, is a bit too hard for women. Well, there would be some who would do it [in other associations], but, at least in *27 de Octubre*, no women work. They can come, for example, when a *minga*[36] [is] organized to clear weeds, or to help in the preparation of food, but nothing more. You cannot force them to work. Some wanted to participate, but I'm telling you, this work is physically demanding. (Interview Luciano Briones, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019)

[36] *Minga* is a word used in Ecuador to refer to the collective work in which all community/association members participate to accomplish a specific task.

Perceptions about the women's engagement in the hard-physical labour of sugar cane cultivation differ when asking female members in each association. FV, an elderly woman, one of the 7 women of the 51 members of the *27 de Octubre* association, and among the few who live in the hacienda, has often been assigned the task of providing meals to people in charge of the maintenance work. When she was asked whether she was working in the sugar cane fields, she responded: "I do not work, first because I am old, and second, because I am a woman" (interview with FV, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019). However, for women of *Buen Vivir* and *La Indiana* associations, both with a larger membership of women, the fact of being a woman is not an impediment to engage in the maintenance activities of sugar cane. For instance, EEE, from *La Indiana* association, gained some experience in the sugar cane fields before she undertook cacao production on her plot of land. She states:

> Any work that a man does in the production of sugar cane, a woman can do it too. This is true also for cacao production. I have one of those weeders that men use. When the day is like it is right now, it's easier because there's shade. But when the sun is strong, it makes you want to die... I get really strong pains. Sometimes [when members] have a few pennies, they would pay someone for a day or two. The workers [they hire] have to be women from the highlands, women from the countryside. (Interview with EEE, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 1, 2019)

Patricia, referring to the work of her *compañeras* in the *Buen Vivir* association, indicated that:

> Women are involved in the same way as men in agriculture. Sometimes they carry out the *roza*, the fumigation, the application of urea. For example, *compañera* Blanquita does work. I don't work because I live elsewhere; I'm not here permanently. I have to be there [in Salitre] because of my children's studies. (Interview with Patricia Ronquillo, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 24, 2019)

In the same vein of thinking about the role of women, Ramona, from *La Indiana* association, puts its proudly:

> I can't work, because I have problems with my spine. But there are women who don't have any problems and would pull out the *cauca* [a particular kind of weed]. They perform the same job as the men. There are strong women here who are not afraid of the *machete.* Here, I would say that women work even harder than men. (Interview with Ramona Macías, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 3, 2019)

As these testimonies indicate, the number of women in each association influences the perceptions about women's work and the way by which labour is organized according to gender in those associations that continue to produce sugar cane.

The reduced number of female memberships appears to result in a strictly gendered division of labour in the *27 de Octubre* association whereby women are assigned only limited participation in the productive domain. In associations with a larger number of female members, women proudly recognize themselves as being able to perform the job as effective as men. However, the testimonies provided above unveil other aspects that determine the involvement of women in the hard physical labour demanded by the cultivation of sugar cane. Indeed, the tasks that women undertake in sugar cane production depends on strength (age), health-physical condition, time availability, and the economic capacity, through their associations or individually, to pay for an external worker to conduct the maintenance work. Ultimately, those women who perform hard physical work in sugar cane production are those with more urgent economic needs and fewer labour opportunities elsewhere.

In addition to their varied engagement in the maintenance work, however, women have taken on greater responsibilities in their functioning of their organizations as they have assumed more leadership roles in the associations. FV, from the *27 de Octubre association*, shares:

> I am responsible for storage. If the members want a tool, [they tell me:] "*compañera*, give me that tool!", or "I am going to take this tool with me". If they buy something, for example, twelve shovels, I have to write down that such a person brought twelve shovels. If they brought *machetes,* I have to write down how many *machetes* they bought. (Interview with FV, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019)

Also, Patricia comments on her leadership role within the organization:

> I'm from the supervisory committee [of the association]. I have gone into the sugar cane fields to supervise the work. We have to watch out, we verify, and we help in what is needed. In this association, the majority [in leadership positions] are women: the president, the administrator, the supervisor, the secretary. (Interview with Patricia Ronquillo, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 24, 2019)

A noteworthy example of the organizational role of women can be seen for the association *Buen Vivir* whose members appointed women into all five board positions. Furthermore, they hired a female administrator. Before assuming these leading positions, women were critical about the funds' management of their former administration that was led only by men. However, they were afraid of being punished for openly expressing their opinions. According to Georgina, "men wanted to be the leaders, but since the majority decides, we succeeded to put the *compañeras* in that

position" (interview with Georgina Rosso, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 23, 2019). As Patricia explains:

> The men who are against us say that women are not capable. When they were in power, they made women work more than men. But the *compañeras* couldn't say anything for fear of being thrown out. Now that we are working in leadership positions, they want to bring us down. (Interview with Patricia Ronquillo, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 24, 2019)

The *Buen Vivir* members who I interviewed agree that the presence of women in leadership roles has made the administration of funds more transparent and effective. However, as Patricia's testimony shows, women continue to face the distrust of former male leaders about their effective performance in leadership roles. Also, despite greater participation in leadership positions, women remain completely excluded in other spaces of power, such as the irrigation and water distribution council (*juntas de agua*).

As my interviews with women from the associations has demonstrated, whether or not female members perform physical maintenance or administrative work, they experience pressure to demonstrate their capacities to be as effective as their male counterparts in roles that have been commonly assigned to men. Furthermore, this adds to the existing hidden pressure that women face due to the reproductive work in their households. Fausto, from *La Indiana* association, was among the few who recognizes that:

> There are some women in office, others are in the field and well, they actually have various jobs. It is a shame that no one has insisted on supporting women. Women are forced to get up early to feed their children and go to work. Women have to do all these things, working for their children, working in their houses... Here, we benefit from it, machismo still reigns. (Interview with Fausto, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 22, 2019)

Indeed, the extractive logic hides the multiple burden on women due to their integration into assigned gendered spaces of sugar cane production while they continue to perform multiple unpaid reproductive activities in their households. As Fausto clearly states, obscuring the importance of women's reproductive work reflects the continuation of the patriarchal system, i.e. the subordination of men over women, that ultimately maintains the functioning of an agrarian extractivist approach. These findings support the contribution by Ojeda (2021) concerning the disproportionate effects of agrarian extractivism on women, whose work ultimately subsidizes the extractivist model as their time and efforts are appropriated. As Ojeda demonstrates, agrarian extractivism

deteriorates social and ecological conditions, thus hindering the possibilities to sustain life. This is a point I will further develop in the last section.

2.4.3 Deterioration of environmental quality, and productive and reproductive conditions

There are different perceptions among members about the use of agricultural inputs and their related environmental and health issues. Franklin, an experienced sugar cane worker of the *27 de Octubre* association, states:

> Since we have already been working in cane [for a long time], we don't have those risks. The chemical is only intended to kill the weed and nothing else. In other words, it doesn't happen that herbicide is sprayed in the canals. It does not happen that some water sources will be contaminated. No, because only the amount that we are going to apply in a certain area comes out of the warehouse. (Interview with Franklin Martínez, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 21, 2019)

However, while recognizing the important role of herbicides in the profitably production of sugar cane, Wilman, from *La Indiana,* also notes there is an impact on the environment. He explains that:

> They [the private companies] organize a small workshop so that people learn how to use the fertilizers and herbicides. We are applying a dose that does not affect the cane. We make two applications in the first four months. From then on, we no longer need to use herbicides or fertilizers. Of course, they have an impact on the environment, even on one's health, but, to be profitable, as producers we have no other alternative. (Interview with Wilman Sarango, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 1, 2019)

The above testimonies reflect how some members perceive the effects of pesticides and other agricultural inputs on nature and health in technocratic terms, i.e. acquiring the know-how about the quantities of chemicals to avoid harm, become more efficient, and increase profits.

Furthermore, the notion that there are no other alternatives seems to have a significant bearing on how members view the effects of sugar cane production on nature and human health. For instance, FV, the elderly woman who lives in the hacienda and is a member of the *27 de Octubre* association believes that, despite the level of contamination to the rural environment, she is better off in *Hacienda La Indiana* than in Milagro, the city where the sugar cane mill *Valdez* is located and where she used to live with her husband. She remembers the days in Milagro "when sugar cane fields were burned, ashes would fall in your backyards … if your windows were open, you could get them on your dishes" (interview with FV, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019). Her

comments clearly signal the environmental effects of the sugar cane agro-industry as a whole. Indeed, a common denominator among populations adjacent to the sugar cane mills has been complaints concerning the contamination caused by sugar cane production. In particular, the population of Milagro city has been denouncing chronic respiratory illnesses, such as bronchitis, caused by the emission of dust and particles in sugar cane production (Harari et al. 2012). In the hacienda, she continues, "The wind carries [the smoke]. You have to become accustomed to living in the countryside" (interview with FV, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019). This reflect the position of some association members who appear to have accepted that their integration into sugar cane production means abandoning their right to a healthy environment.

However, most members raised various concerns related to the use of agricultural inputs, health and nature. As a female association member explains:

> The lands are already tired. You have to add manure, you have to fertilize the lands, you have to do all those things... If you don't do it, [the land] doesn't produce. The land higher up cannot be planted, you have to burn to kill the weeds and be able to plant. The inputs are expensive and I do not have the means to acquire them. I would make any sacrifice to be able to buy [the fertilizers]. Those who know, the old farmers who know about sugar cane, comment that, in general, all the lands are low in nutrients due to [an excess of] chemicals. That is also why they say that there are various diseases, cancer in particular. Yes, one [association] member has cancer. (Interview with EEE, *Hacienda La Indiana,* April 1, 2019)

EEE's statement shows how some members are sceptical not only about the economic benefits, but also about the long-term effects on the soil, water sources and the air, and the consequences for people's health due to the application of chemicals. When referring to the measures taken to avoid harm to people's health due to the direct application of chemicals, some association members mention the use of basic garments such as masks and aprons. However, some also recognize that there is a lack of adequate equipment due to the negligence of association administrators, who are responsible for providing health protection. According to a member of the association *27 de Octubre*, Luciano:

> We don't have any protection. You have already spoken to the leaders of the association. I worked for the sugar cane mill as an administrator. They give you protection. If you fumigate, you receive a half-litre of milk. Here, I do not receive anything. So, the *compañeros* get a bit disoriented because the liquid is quite strong. We have to fumigate because there is a weed that is very, very hardy, the *cauca*, and that [weed] has to be eliminated because it damages the

> cane crop. (Interview with Luciano Briones, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 20, 2019)

Other members even refer to some deaths among those who worked under harsh conditions and were exposed to chemicals without adequate protection. For instance, Fausto, from association *Buen Vivir*, shares his experience:

> We have already been warned that we have to wear a mask and other things to protect ourselves. So, you have to apply them [the chemicals] very carefully. A man came here to work the fields and unfortunately, he died. [He died] because of the handling [of chemicals] and because the work in the field can be very long and the sun is red-hot. As far as I know, four people have already died here in seven years. Well, sometimes we feel unprotected, we don't have adequate protection. They give us the orders that tomorrow you are going to work on this, this, and that, and that's it. But you don't know which kind of protection is right for you and we have to work with whatever comes our way. Those who are in charge are careless, or they want to reduce costs. (Interview with Fausto, *Hacienda La Indiana*, May 22, 2019)

Pesticides are widely applied to eliminate pest infestations and weeds, but, in some cases, also to accelerate the maturation of the sugar cane stalks. Moreover, members referred to the wide use of pesticides, including the well-known and harmful *glifosato*, for the cultivation of other crops in the hacienda. Some stressed that chemicals can be transported through the wind, thus, there are effects on health caused not only by the manual spraying of herbicides in the hacienda but, most importantly, from the aerial fumigations of neighbouring banana plantations. As EE puts it, "we are surrounded by banana plantations. Their [fumigation] planes pass over us, …, here just next to the sugar cane fields there is a banana plantation. Do you think that does not affect us?" (interview with EEE, *Hacienda La Indiana,* April 1, 2019). Indeed, the indiscriminate use of pesticides is the main environmental concerns for some women I interviewed. According to them, environmental conditions are among the key reasons that prevent members from settling in the hacienda and why they choose to keep living in nearby localities. For a female member of the *La Indiana* association:

> Once when the Chinese [the neighbouring banana plantation owner of Chinese origins] fumigated the banana fields, they killed some of our plants, because [the chemicals] were carried by the wind. And that also brings contamination and damage. In the banana plantation they always fumigate without taking precautions and that harms us… it also harms the person who fumigates, because it is a strong product. We made a claim in person. But no other complaints have been made by all the people [that are affected]. (Interview with Ramona Macías, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 3, 2019)

Ramona explains the implications of subsequent contamination of estuaries for women in charge of the care work of their households:

> I think that the water transported by the canals … is not suitable for human consumption because they sometimes fumigate, wash the spray pumps, the boots, the containers without any precautions. All that pollutes the water. People use this water to bathe, people use it a lot to wash clothes, and even to drink. When we didn't have water [from the tanker], I collected water from that well, and I used it to cook. In other words, it was the only source of water we had. But no one has told us that this water is contaminated, that something can happen to us, that we can get ill. In the meetings we have never talked about the environmental issue. (Interview with Ramona Macías, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 3, 2019)

Photo 2. 2 Women (not among those I interviewed) using contaminated water sources to wash clothes in *Hacienda La Indiana*



Source: own authorship.

As feminist political ecology scholars state "(w)omen carry a disproportionate share of responsibilities for resource procurement and environmental maintenance … and yet they have very limited formal rights (and limited political and economic means) to determine the future of resource availability and environmental quality" (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996, 13). Gender-differentiated interests and concerns

of association members regarding the evident environmental destruction result from the gendered division of labour and the associated social norms within society at large. For female members responsible for the essential daily living conditions of their families and associations, the quality of the environment determines the possibility of social reproduction. Nonetheless, for the most part, environmental destruction and resulting health issues are ignored or silenced. As EE states "these health issues are not discussed [within the associations] and remain hidden concerns, talked about, if at all, only among individuals and perhaps within families" (interview with EEE, *Hacienda La Indiana,* April 1, 2019). This resonates with Camacho's (2017) argument that contamination through the use of toxic chemicals in modern agricultural production becomes 'naturalized' in the narratives and practices of those who use them while it remains hidden to public opinion and public institutions. For Camacho (2017), environmental contamination becomes yet another form of dispossession of resources needed for production and social reproduction that occurs in a progressive, subtle, and daily manner.

2.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown that current ethanol production for the Ecuadorian market is characterized by the replication of historic patterns of accumulation and the incorporation of dynamics of economic, social, and environmental extraction that we associate today with agrarian extractivism. The *Ecopaís* agro-fuel program has significantly expanded the cultivated area for sugar cane. But, as argued, the mills continue to own most of the land, thus appropriating the surplus value of the sugar cane produced by them and the small-and-medium scale suppliers. The PAIS Alliance governments have actively promoted an extractive project through the ethanol-based agro-fuel *Ecopaís* using a narrative of energy sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and rural development. Most importantly, I have emphasized that public resources were used in the form of an overpriced ethanol price and public-private partnerships arrangement that expanded the processing capacities of the private distilleries owned by the sugar cane mills. Despite internal disputes between the distilleries and certain state institutions during the Lenin Moreno administration (2017-2021), sugar cane mills have succeeded, through strong lobbying and their political connections, in maintaining the support of public institutions as important allies. While political influence of those

controlling the sugar cane complex is nothing new in the capitalist agrarian history of Ecuador, the recent changes in ethanol production represent a new characteristic of this extractivist project. Today, the three largest sugar cane mills and their distilleries control the processing facilities in which sugar cane becomes ethanol and realise the added value in the name of energy sovereignty.

This chapter also has demonstrated that the new agrarian extractivism in the case of ethanol is characterized by the inclusion of small-scale farmers under the illusion of fostering overall rural development. PAIS Alliance has used this social inclusion discourse to compensate for the weak employment generation in the ethanol processing process. This social component is used to legitimize the appropriation of surplus value and state resources by the sugar cane mills and their distilleries as they consolidate their oligopolistic power through this new extractive dynamic. Moreover, the examination of the *Agroenergía* program in *Hacienda la Indiana* clearly demonstrates that, despite the increased participation of women, there are severe limitations and serious problems in engaging in this agro-extractive model. A principal concern is the meagre economic revenue that members of the association receive due to their increasing dependency on agricultural inputs and the reduction of sugar cane prices that benefit the mills that take advantage of their oligopolistic power and political influence. I have also demonstrated that the risk and fear of losing livelihoods from the production of sugar cane, of paying their debts, and being unable to maintain their access to land is putting more pressure on female members. A pronounced gendered division of labour and social class differences among women who take on the dual burden that implies their integration into sugar cane production, and the destruction of both environmental quality and their productive and reproductive conditions, form part and parcel of this extractive and male-dominated mode of accumulation. Nevertheless, female members have started to question their participation in sugar cane production and are seeking ways of opting out, in search of a sustainable model that will allow them to live on and from the land.

2.6 References Chapter Two

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Preface to Chapter Three

This chapter addresses all three main research questions presented in the introduction. In doing so, it complements the previous chapter by providing more insights to characterize the new features of the current agrarian extractivist process in Guayas. Moreover, it continues the discussion concerning the gender-disproportionate social, economic and environmental effects that translate into a crisis of social reproduction, and, as a consequence, puts into question the sustainability of agrarian extractivism. The chapter also addresses the extent to which the more gender-equal public actually strengthen women's opportunities to challenge the conflicting scenarios of the extractive agricultural model. By providing experiences of food sovereignty, this chapter shows that women's construction of power is the result of the knowledge and capacities they are developing on their land to flout oppressive conditions. The insights provided in this chapter contribute to the broader analysis of peasant mobilization in Guayas and the Ecuadorian state that I explore further in Chapter Four.

Photo 3. 1 A teenager carrying a fumigation backpack in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*



Photo taken by author

3 Chapter Three: Gendered access to land, rice production, and social reproduction in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*

Abstract

This research focuses on peasants who accessed land in seized *Hacienda Las Mercedes* through *Plan Tierras*, the land policy implemented under the PAIS Alliance government's food sovereignty project. Organized by the state into relatively gender-equitable associations, peasants became tied to productivity-led programs that promote access to a technological kit controlled by corporate agri-business. I use an intersection of Feminist Political Economy and Ecology to analyze 44 semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted in Guayas province during 2018-2019. I argue that *Plan Tierras* led to a crisis of social reproduction that was disproportionately borne by the care work of women, given their extended responsibilities in rice production and association activities, as well as the accelerated contamination of subsistence means for household reproduction. However, I demonstrate that it is by engaging in grounded, daily food sovereignty practices that the women of *Las Mercedes* resist the conditions of impoverishment and the contamination of bodies, land, and ecological conditions. In doing so, they gain the capacity to foster alternative relations with the agricultural market and related technologies and actors. This research points to the critical importance of land, and the need to reorient land policy to meet the demands for gender equity, and socially and ecologically just food systems.

3.1 Introduction

Plan Tierras was considered the most emblematic program implemented under the food sovereignty political project of PAIS Alliance governments in Ecuador (2005-2021). The program was designed to reduce land concentration and promote access to land for the most vulnerable sectors of the rural population, peasants without land or with little land, and to ensure stable food production, redistribution of wealth, and the generation of employment (Landívar 2015). In accordance with the constitutional goal of food sovereignty and the related Organic Law of the Food Sovereignty Regime, women heads of families were among the principal target social groups of *Plan Tierras*. This exceptional land policy required the formation of peasant associations to foster another political goal: namely, the building of a social and solidarity economy. The program's

positive step towards gender equity undoubtedly represented a significant advance in acknowledging the important role of women in food production. In fact, *Plan Tierras* created the impression -- and hope -- that peasants, and women in particular, would be prioritized, at the same time that food sovereignty, i.e. peoples ability to make decisions regarding fundamental aspects in healthy and culturally appropriated food production (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010), would be promoted.

However, since the beginning of *Plan Tierras* in 2009, there is growing evidence that there has been no political will to achieve the promised redistributive goals, to create sustainable peasant livelihoods, and to ensure land tenure equity over time (Landívar 2015). Meanwhile, an extensive literature has critiqued the agrarian productivity-led policies of PAIS Alliance for expanding and strengthening middle and large-scale agro-industrial economic actors while promoting the subordination of small-scale farmers' associations to agribusiness interests (Martínez 2015; Kay and Vergara-Camus 2018; Ospina, Hollenstein, and Latorre 2020; Daza 2020). Nonetheless, studies have yet to analyse how *Plan Tierras* and the relatively gender equitable participation assigned to women in peasant associations intertwines with other capitalist logics and the policies of extractive agriculture to create (or destroy) the productive and reproductive conditions under which peasants live from their land and construct food sovereignty.

Approximately 150 women occupied land in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* in the coastal province of Guayas to benefit from *Plan Tierras,* and they subsequently became involved, predominantly, in the production of rice monoculture. This chapter explores how *Plan Tierras*, along with other agrarian policies, tied small-scale producer associations to an extractive agriculture model that fails to provide opportunities for adequate livelihoods to peasant associations. Drawing on Naidu and Ossome (2016) and Ojeda (2021), I contend that a crisis in household social reproduction is disproportionately borne by the care work of women, given their extended responsibilities and the accelerated destruction of the material basis for household reproduction. Social reproduction (Katz 2001; Fraser 2016; Bhattacharya 2017) is a particularly useful approach that overlaps with Feminist Political Economy and Feminist Political Ecology. This cross-sectional approach allows a critical and in-depth analysis of differentiated experiences in gaining access to land, as well as different perceptions of women's labour and its interactions with nature and land. This allows a broad and complex inquiry into the ways in which oppressive narratives, structures, and

practices embedded in agrarian extractive development are shaping understandings and responses to its impact on labour, nature, and human health.

This chapter reflects on the oppression of both women and nature as the basis of a crisis-inherent capitalist agriculture (Vogel 2014; Fraser 2014; Mies 2014) and, at the same time, on the means through which women flout this oppression and construct power over their own lives (Phillips 1987). Indeed, I argue that women are engaging in food sovereignty practices on their plots of land as a form of resistance to the conditions of impoverishment that they are facing within the priority placed on an extractive agricultural model by the state, a model that destroys their bodies, land, and environment. This aspect of my research aims to contribute to emerging efforts to present Latin American perspectives on marginalized rural populations and their articulations with extractive processes in agricultural production based on, and resulting in, productive and reproductive work exploitation and the degradation of essential resources (De Luca, Fosado, and Velázquez 2020; McKay, Alonso-Fradejas, and Ezquerro-Cañete 2021). I strategically center my analysis on the voices and understandings of coastal peasant women in Ecuador, a sector of the population that has been largely ignored by anthropological and rural sociological studies and development agencies as well as the agendas of Non-Governmental Organizations (Baquerizo 2020). By doing this, my intention is to also contribute to rethinking how coastal women's grounded and everyday practices of food sovereignty can be genuinely supported by the state, academia, and civil society organizations (Alonso-Fradejas et al. 2015; Trauger, Claeys, and Desmarais 2017).

This chapter is structured into three main sections. The first briefly identifies the ontological and epistemological intersections between Feminist Political Ecology, Feminist Political Economy, and food sovereignty regarding land and social reproduction. The second section examines the political-economic context within which rural women in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* become beneficiaries of this public land policy. In this section I also analyze how *Plan Tierras* interacts with other agrarian policies to paint the conditions of social reproduction, including the related gendered effects on labour, health, land, and environment caused by the incorporation of peasant into the extractive mono-cropping of rice. The third section examines experiences of four women who are resisting by engaging in food sovereignty practices on their plots of land and by doing so also fostering alternative market relations.

This research is informed by 12 months of fieldwork that I conducted in the Ecuadorian coastal province of Guayas during 2018-2019. It involved a comprehensive document review and 10 semi-structured interviews with leaders of regional peasant organizations and officials of government institutions responsible for or related to the *Plan Tierras,* with specialized knowledge of Guayas. Additionally, I interviewed 34 (17 women and 17 men) members of 9 associations in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* who are (or were) members of the regional umbrella organization *Unión Tierra y Vida*. The fieldwork also involved participatory observation and engagement with the grassroots organizations in various relevant activities, and a focus group with association members whom I had previously interviewed. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit in early 2020, follow-up research through digital interviews was conducted with four women who are members of the associations.

3.2 Social reproduction and land through a feminist lens

The relationship between unequal access to food producing resources, especially land, and unequal intra-household power relations has been an important subject of study for many Feminist Political Economy scholars for some time (see Agarwal 1995; Deere and León 2003; Razavi 2009). The agrarian reform programs that were implemented by Latin American states throughout the 1960s and 1970s, for the most part, excluded women as beneficiaries (Deere and León 1987; Jacobs 2014). Also, market-led neoliberal policies centered on land privatization, implemented since the 1980s, have not been gender-equal despite being implemented in the context of significant legal advances towards women's rights (Deere and León 2001b; Deere 2005). Deere and León (2001a) have argued that demanding land rights for individual women can contest the material base and ideology of patriarchy and are a means through which women can improve their fall-back position, potentially enhancing access to other productive resources and strengthening their household decision-making power. However, this assertion has been questioned in light of the ways in which neoliberal economic policies and institutions embraced women's demands for land rights through an efficiency and poverty reduction lens to ultimately advocate for policies that smoothed the advance of the capitalist agenda (Razavi 2009). Most importantly, as shown in the case of Indian rural society, land policies that center only on women's individual access to land might also ignore the burden of the social reproduction crisis, mostly borne by rural women as

a result not only of patriarchal historical relations but also the impoverishment created by contemporary neoliberal agrarian capitalism (Naidu and Ossome 2016).

Social reproduction encompasses both the unstructured and structured daily and long-term household activities mostly undertaken by the invisibilized and unpaid work of women, work that creates the continued supply of socialized and affective human beings and skilled labour power (Katz 2001; Fraser 2016). Some Feminist Political Economy scholars have shown how gendered social reproduction unfolded throughout capitalist agricultural development in Ecuador. For instance, Phillips (1987) observed women's increasing reproductive labour responsibilities as a result of the discriminatory land reforms implemented in the 1970s, in addition to the cultural preferences within coastal society. She sheds light on how women's control over non-marketized social relations constituted not only an important strategy to guarantee the household's daily survival during an economic crisis but a medium to contest their subordination (Phillips 1987). With the state's withdrawal, as part of neoliberal agrarian policies introduced in the 1990s, other scholars (Cuvi 1992; Deere 2005) noted the burden shouldered by women through their multiple productive roles in and beyond agriculture, along with their domestic reproductive responsibilities. Moreover, in their study about the domination of a productivity and a narrative of "masculine ideals" in agriculture, Paulson and Portillo (2013) observed that the intensification of the use of hybrid seeds and agrochemicals excluded tasks and knowledge that are commonly associated with women, including concerns about environmental deterioration. Despite its importance, ecological issues related to capitalist agriculture have been only marginally addressed as another constitutive element of social reproduction (Katz 2001).

Feminist Political Ecology scholars have observed that current ecological and economic crises inherent to capitalist development have worsened the material conditions of women entrusted with household responsibilities to "guarantee subsistence, protect the health of their families, and the integrity of the surrounding ecosystems" (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996, 16). In this regard, Feminist Political Ecology scholars working on gender, nature, and development in Latin America have focused criticism and proposed alternatives to the extractive industries that have caused inordinate environmental destruction along with gender, racial, and other inequalities since colonial times (De Luca, Fosado, and Velázquez 2020). In her study on agrarian extractivism in the Caribbean regions of Colombia, Ojeda (2021) demonstrates how the violent expansion of oil palm plantations in this

region displaced practices of rice milling and harvesting for household social reproduction that were in the hands of women. Using a Feminist Political Ecology approach, Ojeda (2021) argues that feminized labour subsidizes agrarian extractivism through extended hours of work provided by women and children to secure household social reproduction. Furthermore, the author affirms, oil palm plantations destroy ecologies through water and land pollution and restrict common areas that are essential for accessing food, thus jeopardizing the social and ecological conditions that sustain the life of local communities (Ojeda 2021). Under the current context of repressive and violent forms of land and resource appropriation triggered by the globalized capitalist regime, it is important to understand how women respond to extractive processes in agriculture and defend the ecological basis of their survival.

Food sovereignty, as a political project and theoretical approach, is intrinsically rooted in power relations, the cultural meanings of food, and people's ability to make decisions regarding the fundamental aspects of food systems (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010). Feminist food sovereignty scholars and practitioners have highlighted women's grounded resistance against and alternatives to globalized food and agriculture systems from the perspective of care and sustainability (Pérez and Soler 2013; Oliver 2016), or everyday customary provisioning practices that help ensure localized food systems (Turner et al. 2020). They do so by focusing on the daily care work of food production provided by women that is grounded on specific spaces, ecological conditions, and cultural and historical contexts, and questioning gendered customs and perceptions that essentialize women's roles as caregivers (Pérez and Soler 2013; Zuluaga, Catacora-Vargas, and Siliprandi 2018; Bezner K. et al. 2019). These concrete rooted and daily practices of food sovereignty are interlinked by networks among actors at and across multiple levels and sites (Bezner K. et al. 2019; Schiavoni 2015; Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015). For example, under a popular and peasant feminism stance, peasants, Indigenous, and female farmworkers who are members of the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations CLOC/Vía Campesina, have proposed a new relationship between human beings and nature that acknowledges peasant agriculture and women's knowledge and contributions to production and reproductive work (Seibert 2018).

Having provided a brief discussion of the theoretical frameworks that informed my research, I now turn to an analysis of gender-differentiated experiences with *Plan Tierras* and other agrarian policies implemented in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*.

3.3 *Hacienda Las Mercedes*: *Plan Tierras* and the associative model

Hacienda Las Mercedes is a rural estate of approximately 2,000 has., located in the proximity of Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest urban center in the coastal province of Guayas. Guayaquil is known as the historic seat of the most powerful sector of the country's agricultural export economy and related financial, commercial, and landed elites (North 1985). *Las Mercedes* had been divided into four sites -- *Jugom, Agrícola Las Mercedes, Lamiper*, and *Mariba* – and administered by four companies owned by the Isaías group, one of the bank-owning families that was held legally responsible for the 1999-2000 collapse of Ecuador's financial system. Prior to fleeing the country and abandoning their properties in the late 1990s, the Isaías group had engaged primarily in large-scale rice cultivation and livestock farming (interview with Carmelo Cedeño, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, May 6, 2019). In 2008, *Las Mercedes* was seized by the PAIS Alliance government. As was the case of other seized rural estates, groups of people occupied the different sites of *Las Mercedes*, most notably in 2009, right after PAIS Alliance announced the distribution of these lands to peasants for agrarian activities. With the *Plan Tierras* underway, informal tenants started building peasant associations to comply with the administrative requirements to benefit from the state land policy.

The associative model was expected to be the way in which association members would work the land collectively, at least in theory, and pool the revenues derived from their agricultural activities to pay the mortgage on the land they buy through *Plan Tierras*. Although the collective organizational form of 'cooperativism' has accompanied agrarian reform in the past (Redclift 1978; Uggen 1993), the *Plan Tierras* associative model deserves special attention. The model promoted through the PAIS Alliance's rural development approach was linked to the broader constitutional goals of building a social and solidarity economy and fostering food sovereignty.[37] For this purpose, all associations considered to be a form of 'peasant family agriculture' must register at the Supervisory Office of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (SEPS).[38] SEPS was created in 2012 to control and regulate different organizational forms, including peasant associations (Executive Decree 1061), for whom productive activities

[37] The legal framework is the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 (Arts. 283, 319), the Organic Law of Popular and Solidarity Economy of 2011, and the corresponding General Regulation of 2012.

[38] Before the SEPS, associations were registered at the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion or Ministry of Agriculture.

accounting procedures were simplified and tax exemptions were granted (Naranjo 2016). However, SEPS was questioned for its top-down approach that imposes bureaucratic requirements on small-scale farmers' associations to facilitate their engagement with monocultural production destined for export or for agricultural raw material supply for national industries (Martínez 2015; OCARU 2015). This is particularly important in Guayas, where most of the public investment distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG 2020) under the guise of food sovereignty and peasant agriculture has been allocated to programs and projects that support agribusiness controlled by powerful agrarian elites.

In contrast to the Ecuadorian agrarian reforms of the 1970s that, for the most part, excluded women as beneficiaries (Phillips 1987), *Plan Tierras* required the associations to meet a female quota of 30% of their total membership albeit only the man or the woman of a married or live-in couple can become a member.[39] Table 1 provides the current female membership distribution of 9 associations in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. As Table 1 shows, while all associations do not meet the required quota, others exceed it, and in one case there are even more female than male members. Most of these women range from 40-64 years of age, have a low level of education, and come from poor households of the neighbouring rural villages or marginalized districts of the cities of Guayaquil and Durán. More specifically, this quota system provided 150 adult and elderly women in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* with opportunities to own their income from agricultural activities and to gain financial independence. Alongside their rights to decision-making on matters related to the associations through their membership, members gain the opportunity to undertake roles within their associations. This positive step towards gender equity and food sovereignty undoubtedly raised great expectations in a country where 63% of rural women do not own the land on which they live and depend (Ferreira et al. 2014).

[39] This means that a member's partner is formally excluded from decision-making within the association.

Table 3. 1 Women's participation in *Las Mercedes*

Associations	Members	Female members	Percentage
ATARA	74	26	35%
Rafael Brito Mendoza	35	11	31%
Emmanuel	31	8	26%
Victoria de Las Mercedes	43	10	23%
Nueva Revolución	42	13	31%
Patria Nueva	74	43	58%
Fe del Campesino	43	15	35%
Ex Trabajadores	46	8	17%
Ganaderos Félix Mora León	73	13	18%
Total	**461**	**147**	**30%**

Source: Unión Tierra y Vida archives. Guayaquil, January 2019

More than a decade after *Plan Tierras* started, only four associations (*ATARA*, *Rafael Brito Mendoza*, *Emmanuel* and *Victoria de Las Mercedes*) were able to acquire 31% of the total area of this rural state. While *Rafael Brito Mendoza*, *Emmanuel* and *Victoria de Las Mercedes* received a single associative title for the site *Jugom* in 2012, *ATARA* received it for the site *Agrícola Las Mercedes.* The agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture and the associations that bought land in 2012 included the promise of drafting productive projects to be funded by the public bank, *BanEcuador* (formerly known as the *Banco Nacional de Fomento*). However, no such commitments were respected.[40] Furthermore, associative credits were not available due to the bureaucratic complications created by the associative land title shared between three associations. For this reason, associations have been demanding the individualization of the associative title, but the political will to take timely corrective action has not been forthcoming (Landívar 2015; Landívar and North 2016). The other associations, *Patria Nuev*a, *Fe del Campesino*, *Ex Trabajadores* and *Ganaderos*, have maintained *de facto* possession of the sites *Mariba* and *Lamiper* in the hope to benefit from this public policy.[41] Regardless of their current land tenure situation, association members have

[40] Instead, associations received some sporadic training on administrative capacity-building and rice production through the non-governmental organization CESA-FEPP consortium, without significant impact. In 2020, a project to modernize irrigation methods for cacao and rice for the four associations with associative land titles was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture. This research does not analyze the consequences of this project.

[41] The land tenure situation described here refers only to the 9 associations involved in this research.

engaged in cash crop production, predominantly, in rice production, that they carry out individually on their plots of land.

In the next section I will examine the multiple roles that women have undertaken through their engagement in the extractivist logic of rice production in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*.

3.3.1 Women's multiple roles: rice producers, association leaders and housewives

The cultivation of rice during the rainy coastal winter months (December-April) demands hard physical labour although it is also a crop that requires the use of machinery and other equipment. Before the planting begins, the soil is prepared with a *motoguadaña* that cuts the plant stems from the previous season. Then, in early December, soils are ploughed by using what coastal peasants call a *canguro*. Once the fields are swamped with the first rainfall in December and January, a *fanguadora* or *pataleta* is used to remove the humid soil right before the seeding. In the following months as the crop grows, they engage in hard-physical maintenance tasks such as weeding or herbicide application using fumigations pumps. The crop is usually mechanically harvested in the summer months of May and June by so-called *enganchadores* (intermediaries) who transport the crop to the rice mills. Since machinery and equipment were not provided by *Plan Tierras,* association members need to rent them from well-off men in their associations, or other individuals outside the hacienda. Despite the fact that the use of these technologies is male dominated, women have undertaken a variety of tasks throughout the production process.

Similar to my discussion in Chapter Two of women's involvement in sugar cane production, when it comes to rice production, some women perform tasks that demand hard physical labour. For instance, Adelaida, the administrator of the *Victoria de Las Mercedes* association, is one of the women who went to the flooded rice fields to perform maintenance work. As she explains:

> My dad was a farmer in Samborondón [nearby rice producing rural district]. I was quite attached to him. During vacation times, I followed him and watched how he worked. I didn't do it to learn [how to cultivate rice], just to be with him. And I enjoyed it! The cultivation of rice is not just a man thing. My brother has also devoted himself to agriculture; when we were small, we were to two who wandered around the fields. When people harvested the rice [manually], there was always something leftover and my brother and I would spend time harvesting the leftovers. And we sold that rice. (Interview with Adelaida Castro, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, May 1, 2019)

Likewise, Rocío, who was born in the neighbouring province of Los Ríos, is proud of her rural origins, as she states, "that was what our parents taught us. We grew up in the countryside, and we are now using our knowledge here. This is what we know" (interview with Rocío Gonzáles, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 29th, 2019). Indeed, during the first years after she arrived in the hacienda, Rocío cultivated rice on a total of 25 hectares of land where she lives part time and that she and her five sisters were assigned by their association *Fe del Campesino*. Marcelina, one of Rocío's sisters, explains how they were in charge of productive tasks that have been normally assigned to men:

> We women work with all kinds of crops. As women from the countryside, if needed, we would put on the pump and go to work, use the machete to clean the plantain… When they [the *enganchadores*] buy the rice right here, they would bring the harvest machine and the truck to take the harvest. In that case, there would be no work for us. But when you haven't pre-sold it to them, then, it's up to yourself to harvest the rice... we would fill the sack, tie and sew and have it ready to ship and sell. We would do all the work. (Interview with Marcelina, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 28, 2019)

The quotations above show that women's agricultural background and experience play an important role in the extent to which they engage in the seasonal work of rice production on their plot of land. When referring to women of her family, Rocío' niece, Lucía, proudly states that:

> My aunts and my mother, they are all women who like to work *al machete*. They are not 'embarrassed' about that. I mean, I'm not very good at that, walking around with a machete and doing that job, but instead, they are women from the countryside who like to work like men. Just like men they work… even more than men, because my aunt Marcela and my mom they are all women who have worked with the machete. If they get to work along with a man, they would defeat them. (Interview with Lucia Miño, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 28, 2019)

As Lucía's statement highlights, despite the physical strength of some experienced women, hard physical labour is culturally associated with the idealization of male bodies in the agriculture. Lucía, who recognizes that she does not have the physical strength for agricultural tasks, continues to explain how she organizes the work with her live-in partner and children:

> When he [her live-in partner] goes to seed, I go with my children to help him. It's the four of us, no one else. When it's time to fumigate, he does it. We carry the water so that he can fumigate. Yes, that's how we work. He does something, we help him. That's how it becomes easier for us. (Interview with Lucia Miño, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 28, 2019)

The same is true for Julia, a member of the association *Patria Nueva*, who shares how she works together with her husband:

> I help my husband here outside. But walking in there, nope. It scares me a lot. I'm very afraid of snakes… We get a lot of rain in the winter. The water reaches my husband up to here [pointing to her knees]. You know that it is dangerous there. Anyway, he tells me that I have to go… he tells me to get on the mare. I am also afraid of the mare. Sometimes, I go to work in fear... I have helped him carrying the water so that he can fumigate. Or we would seed the rice together, nothing else. It is just a man who is in charge of plowing the land and we who do the seeding. Because of my fear, I only do the *alvoleo* [broadcast sowing]. (Interview with Julia Macías, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 27, 2019)

Similarly, Norma from the *Ganaderos* association, who also works only with her husband, states:

> Well, sometimes I have helped him to carry the hoses for the pump, [I have helped with] anything when I accompanied him [to work]. But to work hard, nope, I can't at my age. I am sixty-six years old, my girl, … Cultivating rice is hard work. (Interview with Norma Vargas, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 11, 2019)

These quotations demonstrate that, whatever the physical condition and age of some women, they complement the work of their live-in partners or other family members by carrying out tasks that might include the provisioning of water and food and non-mechanized seeding.[42] In this regard, some men believe that the work performed by their live-in partners is equivalent to the hard physical labour that they perform. As Victor Hugo, from the association *Patria Nueva* puts it, "I work with my sons. Sometimes my wife helps with preparing the food, this is work too" (interview with Victor Hugo *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 25, 2019). Also, Carmelo, a member from the association *Ex Trabajadores,* who works with the support of his son and live-in partner, shares this perspective:

> We [he and his live-in partner] do almost all tasks together. I am the one who does the heavy work. But if I see that she can help me, I tell her 'let's go'. For instance, during the fumigation. She is not going to carry the pump on her back or walk through the mud that comes up to knee height… So that's heavy work. At least, I consider it heavy, right? She won't be able to do that job. You work four, five hours like this. Peasant life is hard sometimes. Planting rice is difficult, it is quite complicated.

When I asked what work his partner does, Carmelo went on to say,

[42] Members refer to both seeding in form of *al voleo* (broadcast sowing) or *al espeque* (using a stick to make the hole in the soil).

> The housekeeping, and helping with the provisions. She can do that. She can help me with carrying the water or the 'poison' [herbicide]. She is also in charge of sowing beans and corn. (Interview with José Carmelo, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, May 6, 2019)

While some women rely on the non-paid support of their live-in partners or members of their extended families, others hire external young male workers, *jornaleros*, many of whom are acquaintances who are reliable and charge them an affordable price. They support hired workers through provisioning work, as Magna, a woman in her mid-sixties, explains: "I normally asked for help, I asked one or two *compañeros*. I always look out for them, to provide water, juices, food, or I help them, for example, when they are cleaning the plots" (interview with Magna Vera, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 4, 2019). JACG, who hires external workers to help her and her seventy-four-years-old father, puts it this way:

> We look for a day worker to cultivate the rice. My specific task in rice cultivation is to supervise, to make sure that they do the work as I want it done. I recognize I do not have the same strength as other women. Yes, there are other women who would sow and work with the machetes. Some of them would carry the pumps, fumigate, sow. I haven't done it but everything is possible. But, I am not afraid of doing other things. I sow plantain, lemons… I harvest such large lemons. (Interview with JACG, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 29, 2019)

When asked about the work of women in the production process of rice, Guillermo from the association *Nueva Revolución* affirms:

> A woman can do it. She can do it complementarily with the husband or find a worker and guide the work, be the *jefa* (head) of the work. It is not impossible for her to cultivate the rice. That is why she can always be in the lead, as the *jefa* of the farm. And she can perform certain activities in agriculture, and do it better than a man. For example, she can plan the logistics better: combine inputs, plan the date of planting and application of inputs. She can organize production. Perhaps she cannot do the physical work one hundred percent like a man, but there is work that she can do better than a man. (Interview with Guillermo Pineda, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019)

These quotations make it clear that, beside the provisioning of food and water, women who hire external workers undertake the logistical tasks of rice production such as supervising the fumigation and scheduling the seeding or making decisions about the combination of productive inputs (urea, herbicides, and pesticides). Overall, the interviewees' contributions demonstrate that although men dominate the mechanized part of rice production, women perform a variety of productive tasks that are dependent

on their agricultural background, physical condition/age, economic possibility to pay for external workers, and the support of their live-in partners or family members.

Moreover, women's new roles in the production of rice were accompanied by the possibility of assuming formal leadership roles and carrying out various tasks related to organizational matters, including advocacy work *vis-a-vis* state institutions. The women who I interviewed, in general, were reluctant to talk about the ways in which their new roles in the associations affect power relations within their households. Alexandra, a well-known leader of the association *ATARA*, was one of the few who openly shared information from her private space. She recalls the heated discussions she had with her husband:

> Natalia, I tell you that they [public officials] have called me from Quito, and they have told me that the meeting is at such a time, on such a day. Well, [I say], I'll be there. I don't say "let me consult, eh, let me see if I have time, let me see if I have money", no! I get [money] and leave right away. I have also taken trips outside Ecuador… I am married, well-married, ecclesiastical and civil. I did not tell my husband and I made the decision myself. But when I told him, he asked "why are you leaving?" [Earlier on] he had prevented me from being in the association.
>
> When he told me that I should leave the association, I told him, "look *mijito*, are you working? an you make a loan? And what do you buy? Nothing! I am fighting in that association ... I know the process I am going through and I know that I am going to win it ... that is why I did not let this [land struggle] go on. That's one [reason], the other is that all those people trust me. And I'm not going to let them down... I'm going to repay [their trust] by getting the land."
>
> [And] yes, I'm still married to that man (laughter). I haven't been divorced. I told him, "You know that I like to work in the fields. Look at how the house is now, … I have bought an elevated tank and got someone to install it. What I earned with the sweat of my brow is mine. If I am sharing it with you, it is because you are my partner, but not so much because of you, but for my children". (Interview with Alexandra Lavalle, *Hacienda Las Mercedes,* May 6, 2019)

Women leaders were more open to talking about their experiences within their associations, including raising concerns about the chauvinistic (*machista*) attitudes of their male colleagues who felt threatened and disrespected by the women who took on leadership roles and spoke openly to them. As Rocío from association *Fe del Campesino* puts it:

> When we first organized ourselves, there were fifty-one members, and among them, about three were *machistas*. They were those who would hit women, who would tell them to 'clean my feet'...
> When I was in charge of the association, I told them what to do... They didn't like it, …, they weren't used to a woman giving them orders, ..., we had some

> arguments… “then I'm leaving this association”, [one of them said] “this old woman does whatever she wants”. But this was not the case... [I told him] “you have to submit to what the organization has decided here”. For example, [you have to submit] to someone telling them, “*compañeros*, we're all going to do a *minga*... look, you are in charge for this thing, you are in charge of the other thing”. So, they didn't like it... they said “we know what we're going to do” and “why does she have to give us orders” ...
>
> There were also other things that they did not agree with, but they did not say it in the room: but they would say it [privately] to other members. So, I told them, “if you have something to say, say it here so that we can know where the mistake is, to draw the conclusions and to be able to move forward’. They didn't like it when you would reproach them either. It's just that they're not used to that (laughs). (Interview with Rocío González, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 29, 2019)

Similarly, Alexandra recounts:

> Well, there is quite a bit of *machismo* here. I tell them [the members] tough things directly, and there are colleagues who say “*compañera*, don't disrespect me”, but how do you want me to make them understand? I tell you, here in the ATARA association women do participate. There are only two *compañeras* who speak little. They do not offer their opinion or suggestions. They are more *mandadas* [subordinated women] than women who make their own decisions. They don't even decide in their own house. Who is in charge there is sometimes the son or the husband. (Interview with Alexandra Lavalle, *Hacienda Las Mercedes,* May 6, 2019)

While conducting interviews and during observing participation of the advocacy work with state institutions, I also encountered affirmations that women were the most “active”, “feisty” members with the “strongest voices”, or with statements such as “women look nicer [when placed] in the front”. When probing into details, the latter remarks continue to reveal historical cultural perceptions about women’s expected roles and the challenges they face in coastal rural society. Indeed, some male counterparts prefer not to become the visible faces of the land struggle and, instead, secure a rear-guard position, in attempts to avoid conflictive encounters with public officials. Others do not want to lose their daily income from agricultural activities that the burdensome advocacy work often implies. These testimonies provided through the interviews make it clear that the state’s goal of achieving greater gender equity led to important transformations in households and associations as women gained more economic independence and assumed more responsibilities within their associations. This collided with historical patterns of male dominance over women embedded within coastal society, patterns that are often accompanied by violence against women. When asked

about how women experience the struggle for land differently their male counterparts, Raquel, the coordinator and leader of *Unión Tierra y Vida* stated that:

> There is a difference. We women are stronger and we consider ourselves stronger because, when you get up early, as a woman you have to organize many things in your house before going to cultivate your plot. We have been fighting for our own piece of land and to be able to produce what we want... and to not be simply dependent on your husband... At the beginning of all this struggle, there were not many women who spoke with a strong voice to the government or to different state entities… a few women that you could count with your fingers. Now there are many more women who tell the bad government how corrupt it is or how corrupt officials are. And we say it to their faces because we feel the suffering of our family. This is not to say that male partners are not sensitive, but we women feel this more strongly. We see this struggle much further than our *compañeros* do. (Interview with Raquel Silva, Guayaquil, July 3, 2019)

Raquel's assertion hints at the numerous challenges that women with a low educational level and risky socio-economic conditions face while taking on multiple tasks and becoming the strongest voice of their associations. *Plan Tierras* did not include specific and continuous measures to help women address patriarchal relations of power within their associations and households. In fact, it has only been through the continuous support of *Tierra y Vida* that women have been learning to speak in public and express their opinions while they work alongside other women in developing skills to better manage association issues and dynamics. These statements also point to the multiple burdens that women members shoulder: domestic tasks along with new responsibilities in agricultural production as well as organizational obligations, in a context of persistent gender hierarchical structures in households, associations, public institutions, and society at large. As the next section demonstrates, this becomes even more critical in the absence of adequate revenue from the production of rice under extractivist logics and the related destruction of the means of subsistence.

3.3.2 Social reproduction, contaminated nature, and poisoned bodies

As part of this top-down policy focussing on the alleged need to increase the productivity of rice and corn fields, especially in Guayas, since 2013 PAIS Alliance widely promoted the access to seeds and chemical inputs through *Plan Semillas* (Singaña 2018).[43] *Plan Semillas* formed part of a public-private partnership between the

[43] The program was first introduced in 2013 as *Plan de Semillas de Alto Rendimiento* (High Yield Seeds Plan) and years later as *Proyecto Nacional de Semillas*

Ministry of Agriculture and the six principal agribusinesses[44] in the country (Gavilanes 2019; Singaña 2018). Through a credit obtained from the public bank *BanEcuador*, farmers could buy the 'technological kits', with a subsidy paid directly to the commercial outlets of the agribusinesses (Gavilanes 2019).[45] The kit was composed of high-yield seeds, fertilizers, and herbicides that are all provided by private agribusinesses, alongside technical assistance services provided by the state. The Ministry of Agriculture aggressively implemented *Plan Semillas* in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. The following quotes provide insights into the experiences that many association members had with accessing kits through this public policy. As Alexandra, from association *ATARA*, explains:

> Look, it is the inputs that are the most expensive. What we didn't like, and why we stopped working with them, is that these *Plan Semillas* engineers come as MAGAP [Ministry of Agriculture] officials as well as 'merchants' from agribusiness. So, they appear to have two jobs, it seems to me. When they come and present themselves as MAGAP officials to help us out with the kit, so that we can work, they [also] come to sell you practically the entire kit box. In it there are poisons [herbicides] that one does not use. But you still have to pay for them. It is not that the MAG gives them to us for free, we have to pay for them. That is why we decided that the member who wants to [buy the kits] can do it, but as an association, we do not buy more kits [from the *Plan Semillas*]. No, we do not buy them because they are not convenient. Sometimes new products come out and among peasants we know what generates greater profits for us. (Interview with Alexandra Lavalle, *Las Mercedes* May 6, 2019)

Alexandra's statement suggests how *Plan Semillas* officials might have used associations to tie a larger number of peasants to a loan that was conditioned to the acquisition of selected productive kits provided by the agribusiness companies. Others expose the serious implications that this has had for many peasants. For instance, José Carmelo, from *Ganaderos*, elucidates:

> We need the kits no later than the end of December. But that *Plan Semillas*, the agricultural kits that the government provides, arrive here at the end of January, mid-February, when winter is advanced. Imagine that! Tell me how that is going to benefit us. Here, the peasant has to know how to compete with the water level. You know that you have to plant no later by the first rains that come late or mid-December, December 25th or it could be the 30th. As soon as it starts to

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de Alto Rendimiento para Agro-cadenas Estratégicas (National Program of High Yield Seeds for Strategic Agro-chains).

[44] They are AGRIPAC, Del Monte, Ecuaquímica, AFECOR, INTEROC, and PRONACA (also known as India).

[45] For products such as corn, the program also worked as a form of contract farming since farmers have the option to pay with their production at a minimum price set by the government (Gavilanes 2019).

> rain, you put a machine to work, right away, pas, pas, pas... You put the machine to work twice, and once you see the downpours, you do the seeding. You need to have everything seeded in January, no later than mid-January.
>
> Suppose winter comes with a lot of rain. Once the rice begins to sprout, it begins to struggle with the water. As the water rises, it forces the rice to grow. Imagine if I am going to seed in the middle or at the end of February, when five or six downpours have already fallen? So, that has been the reason why many people here at *Las Mercedes* are indebted with the bank. They have taken loans from the bank and they have not been able to pay back for that reason. I tell you, the kits do not work. (Interview with José Carmelo, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, May 6, 2019)

Vicente, who applied to Plan Semillas with three neighbours from his association *Patria Nueva*, refers to his experience regarding the same issue:

> Look, the kits, for example, they favoured me with the kits. I told them very clearly that they should deliver them to me, hopefully, by December fifteenth at the latest. They were delivered in February. . . Doña Blanca, I don't know if she has told you? Doña Blanca got the loan for the kit too, and I even acted as guarantor for her. We confirmed with them [*BanEcuador*] that it should be delivered to us no later than the fifteenth at the latest . . . Yes, yes, yes, said the engineer, Quiroga. And what happened? Waiting and waiting… Look, they delivered them to us in February, when the rice was big like this. . . Well, rice doesn't wait long for us. Being a loan, it has to be delivered at the time agreed upon. I told them, I don't [need them anymore], I already planted [the rice]. We had to submit the paperwork that we did not want the loan. Doña Blanca got the kits, but it did not help . . . And I was afraid that Doña Blanca would not be able to pay back the loan. (Interview with Vicente Suáres, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 26, 2019)

Blanquita, the *compañera* Vicente refers to, shares her thoughts:

> They [*Plan Semillas*] ask you: which commercial outlet do you prefer? AGRIPAC? Ecuaquímica? But when you go to the outlet, they give you a package that they already prepared for you. It's not that I say: "give me this, give me that". Nope! They give you a box with all the inputs. It turns out that the inputs didn't work. Yes! . . . I had to buy other liquids [her husband intervenes to say "they gave us many things that we didn't use and we didn't know what they were for"] Yes! So, they would give you what they could no longer sell [her husband intervenes again to say, "up there we have some products that we never used"]. (Interview with Blanca Jiménez, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 26, 2019)

Fortunately, Blanquita was able to pay the loan to the bank through income sources other than agriculture. Nonetheless, JACG, from *Victoria de las Mercedes*, argues that not everyone has the same possibilities, as she shares her experience:

> It was only during the first year that we purchased the kit. We went to the bank to take out the loans, and they already had everything organized. We simply

> signed and they told us: ‘There are these [products] and these here [commercial outlets] are the ones that participate’. There are cheaper kits on the market. But you can't choose them because you're working with the bank loan. So, I signed and the money was transferred to the commercial outlet. We are the ones who get into debt but they do not allow us to choose the kit we want to buy. We are the ones who know the land we farm, and we can say which seeds are best for producing rice. We are forced to purchase those kits but they do not give us the same results that we expect.
>
> Since we don't acquire the seed that is best adapted to the land, we don't have a good production and we can't pay the debts to the bank, many *compañeros* have not been able to pay their debts. I was able to pay back, but I tried very hard, looking for money from other sources. That is not the idea of success. That is why I have stopped reapplying for this loan. (Interview with JACG, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 29, 2019)

As Janeth and Blanca suggest, not all members have the capacity to earn money through other sources to pay their debts back to the bank, and they consequently fall into indebtedness through *Plan Semillas*. In addition to providing seeds and herbicides that are expired or not delivered in time, association members complained about the quality of the products. According to Victor Hugo from *Patria Nueva*:

> They give us expired seeds. And if they are not expired, they give them after you no longer need them… They give you the kit when winter has arrived. When the rice is more or less germinating, the kits come. So, what are [the seeds from the kits] good for? To throw them to the chickens. We just need to have the money to buy the certified seeds and the chemicals that [really] kill the weeds. Because what you have in those kits is pure ‘rice water’. Today it looks like it might have worked, but the next day [the weed] is up like a mountain. It doesn't kill [the weed], it's a bad material. I don't know how, but the fact is that these chemicals don’t work well. Yes! For example, last year … I paid the bank about two thousand and something [US dollars], and I only bought three kits. And I say that I paid that money ‘for fun’, because I didn't plant the rice seed, because they gave it to me when the other rice was already planted. Can you imagine that? So, this is a loss for the farmer. Paying for product that was not even used. (Interview with Victor Hugo Olmedo, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 25, 2019)

The ineffectiveness of the pesticides for controlling the increasing numbers of pests and weeds proliferation was a recurrent concern for many. For instance, Guillermo, a long-time small-scale rice producer in the association *Nueva Revolución*, notes that “the costs of agricultural inputs are higher every day and every day there are more pests. Every day the rice becomes more resistant to those products, but we do not have other options to using them. It is on the inputs that the most money is spent” (interview with Guillermo Pineda, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019). José from *Ganaderos* further explains:

> We apply the same products and look at the results, full of weeds . . . I don't apply the same products, they do not work anymore, perhaps the dose isn't the same, it is not the same substance, I do not know what it is. I tell you that, as the days pass, there is more plague and new products keep coming out. If you apply a product this year, you won't be able to use the same product next year because you have other kinds of pests. Years ago, we worked here, we sowed rice, we fumigated the weeds, applied the *urea* and the herbicides, and that was that. Now, we have double the costs. For what? To get a blemished rice [*arroz manchado*] that the mill does not want to buy? What good is it for you to have a good harvest, if the mill often doesn't even want to buy it from you. The inputs become more expensive and rice, cheaper. This is why I practically stopped growing rice last year. (Interview with José Ceballos, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 11, 2019)

Emilio, who is an experienced rice producer of association *Patria Nueva*, agrees that:

> Right now, the liquids are not the same as before, three or four years ago. The problem that we often have with herbicides is that they no longer work as well as before. [The effect of the liquid] has deteriorated. The 'insects' have become resistant, and they do not die. You apply but then you have to fumigate again in four or five days. You know that this is not possible because there are no gifts of money. And before you fumigated every fifteen, every twenty days. (Interview with Emilio Castro, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 4, 2019)

The above quotes describe the different problems that association members faced through greater access to the technological kits provided by *Plan Semillas*, including the arbitrary imposition of products that proved to be more expensive and useless due to their expiration, lack of quality or unsuitable delivery time. This creates a spiral of dependency as resilient pests and weeds increased while herbicides and fertilizers distributed by commercial outlets-agribusiness became significantly more expensive from year to year. There are no official data available that document the degree of indebtedness generated by the greater access to *Plan Semillas* technological kits. However, the experiences recounted above speak to the high debt loads that many association members in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* have incurred in buying kits and their subsequent inability to repay these loans due to the problems described. Moreover, as Singaña (2018) demonstrates, the six agribusinesses involved in *Plan Semillas*, most notably the National Food Processing Company (PRONACA), significantly increased their yearly earnings during the implementation of *Plan Semilla* from 2013 to 2016.[46]

[46] Singaña (2018) attributes the profits decrease starting in 2016 to the economic crisis that prevented the national government from continuing to pay the commercial outlets.

This suggests a process of capital accumulation through the technological kit market controlled by the six agribusinesses and promoted by the state's *Plan Semillas* program.

The reluctance to continue using *Plan Semillas* has not hindered association members in seeking access to agrochemical inputs through more direct sources. Lucía Miño, from *Fe del Campesino,* shares that she and her husband stopped accessing inputs through *Plan Semillas* because they were looking for a closer contact with the providers. She describes her experience with the commercial outlets:

> Well, this time my husband was at AGRIPAC, and an engineer who is a friend gave him the products so that he could fumigate… yes… he helped him with that. If he wouldn't have helped him at that moment, production would have been lost because those animals [the pest called *langostas*] eat the leaves very quickly and then it's over. Well, thank God, that man helped him and he was able to fumigate in the month of December and those animals were gone. (Interview with Lucía Miño, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 28, 2019)

Similarly, Isidra María, from *Ganaderos,* tells us:

> My husband buys the liquids [fertilizers] and the urea for each harvest from a large store [commercial outlet] owned by engineer Campoverde on *La Veintiseis* [nearby rural village]. It is an important expense, but if you don't do it, if you don't add those liquids to the rice, well, it would be lacking something … and you wouldn't get a good harvest. He gives us the possibility of buying the liquids. When we need liquid and we don't have money to pay for it, he helps us, he gives us the liquid for the harvest. He has known this man for years. (Interview with Isidra María Vera, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 12, 2019)

While some association members like Lucía and Isidra María see the direct relationship they have built with merchants from commercial outlets as positive, Mariana Vallejo from association *Emmanue*l believes that the outlets take advantage of them. She states:

> Oh, those kits, my girl. Don't even talk about those kits... this is a headache here... those at the commercial houses are opportunists who take advantage of poor farmers. For example, the urea that normally costs twenty-two fifty [dollars], that I just bought, they raise it to twenty-eight, thirty dollars. Oh, look… For one hectare, I need six [bags of urea] and this is half [of what is needed], because there are three applications that should be made, and I only make one, with six or seven bags. I didn't buy the *ayara* [name of urea] in *La Veintiséis* [nearby rural village], I just bought the other one, the thick one. I bought it for twenty-two fifty [dollars]. But here instead the price comes up to twenty-eight. Instead of helping us, they screw us up more. [A neighbour intervenes to say "yesterday, I bought the *ayara* at thirty-one and fifty"]. (Interview with Mariana Vallejo, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, May 7, 2019)

Along the same line, Leonardo from *Nueva Revolución* shares his experience accessing agrochemical inputs through a private bank linked to the commercial outlets:

> How do they sell us the seed? Sixty [US] dollars a bag. We have four hectares and twenty-three or forty-three, I think that [is the number of] the hectares we have. We need to apply five sacks for each seeding, plus the fumigation. You have to buy the poison. How much is the input? So that you understand, [cultivating] is more expensive than what we receive from the *señores* [rice mills] for our rice. How much do we receive for the rice harvest? At twenty-two, twenty-three, eighteen [dollars per sack of rice], plus we also need to pay for the rice harvesting. What is left to us? Debts. And the debts that we have with the banks? Just a while ago the *Banco del Pichincha* sent me a message. That bank has been the worst. A lady came here to offer us the kits last year. She worked for a commercial outlet. She was promoting [the kits] and everything. She said that the bank would give us a loan and this and that. In the end we got the loan for two thousand dollars. Hmmm... When the bank called us to sign the loan, everything was already tied up. How much did the input cost us? One thousand three hundred and fifty [dollars]. The bank gave us two thousand dollars, on top of that the [bank] charged for insurance. We paid more than two hundred and something for insurance. What I earned was three hundred twenty-eight dollars and, with that money, I need to keep working.
>
> The harvest was lost. Not only did I lose, we all lost. This is the debt I have with *Banco del Pichincha*. They call me every passing day, because my debt is already at two thousand five hundred something. And how should I pay the bank? If I don't even have enough for my own food. I'm already sixty-seven years old, and they don't want to give me a job anymore. Well, my children work in Guayaquil, the three I have. . . Well, they help each other and they send me ten dollars each . . . It's thirty dollars that I receive from them to buy food. (Interview with Leonardo Vargas, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019)

Leonardo's statement clearly explains how the engagement of association members in rice production exposes them to high risks as they become dependent on the most powerful state-supported agribusinesses that control the market for agricultural inputs. However, the high debt loads that many members have incurred in buying kits, and their subsequent inability to repay loans is not owed only to public and private financial institutions or commercial outlets. As José from the association *Ganaderos* puts it, "If you want to buy the kits, you need to have half of the money …you need to borrow the money from the *chulquero* at interest. The amount you save with the kits, the *chulquero* takes it" (interview with José Cevallos, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 11, 2019). José's observation raises the lack of appropriate financing to invest in the production of rice among many producers who are often left with no other option but to seek capital through informal local moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates. Indeed, it is estimated that only 4.2% of the total number of producers at the national level finance their activities through private and public banks (ESPAC 2020).

All of this adds to the historic structural problems of rice production that members of the associations face, e.g. oversupply and low prices paid by the rice mills (Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganaderia 2017; Singaña 2018), combined with the elimination of tariffs as a consequence of the recent free trade agreement with the United States under the government of PAIS Alliance. As Guillermo, from the association *Nueva Revolución* explains:

> It is very complicated for peasants. We always have to deal with the *chulquero* or with the little money we make. The problem is that [the situation] has become much worse in recent years because rice prices have dropped so badly that they do not even cover production costs. So, if you are going to add a product to a hectare of rice, you think about it four, five times because later . . . [the earnings] don't cover the costs of production. You always lose. (Interview with Guillermo Pineda, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019)

Blanquita, from association *Patria Nueva*, adds:

> There is almost no profit. The problem is that at harvest time the price drops and they pay you very little. The truth is that… there is not much income to live well. That's why most of us, if you think about it, are failing financially. There is no profit. For example, last year we lost everything. That is why this year hardly anyone planted rice. There was only one person who planted rice… but this person lost everything. In my case, thank God, as I told you, I have another little job and that gives us the possibility of staying here. Oddly enough, with that and with the other little incomes we have, we are able to stay here. I don't know how the *compañeros* can survive. Well, they have their chickens, ducks, they sell passion fruit, lemons, plantain, whatever they have. So, with that you can subsist, but expecting to live from planting rice is difficult. (Interview with Blanca Jiménez, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 26, 2019)

Mariana, from the *Emmanuel* association, shares similar thoughts about living from rice production:

> It's a sacrifice to have this rice... For family consumption there is yucca, plantain, corn [that is almost ready now], some corn out there and my fish as well, thanks be to God. I can live from that. It's very difficult, but thank God, I have two children in Spain and they partially support me. But the situation is also bad in Spain. (Interview with Mariana Vallejo, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, May 7, 2019)

The experience of people I interviewed emphasize that the revenues generated from rice production under an extractivist logic are insufficient to guarantee the social reproduction of association members and their families. Indeed, those associations that bought land in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* have found themselves repeatedly in arrears and have requested that the Ministry of Agriculture restructure mortgage payments on various occasions, most recently after the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. Dissuaded

from continuing to cultivate rice, many have moved to the production of other cash crops that they consider less risky. The lack of adequate income has also forced some to diversify their income by becoming casual labourers in non-agricultural sectors in Durán and Guayaquil, or in the neighbouring newly-developed shrimp industry, or on the long-established banana plantations. As well, they continued to rely on remittances sent by family members from abroad. In sum, they continued with the characteristic patterns of work that were observed as a result of policies introduced by neoliberal governments in the past. The testimonies provided here also hint at the reliance of many members on subsistence agriculture to maintain the social reproduction of their families. However, as I discuss below, agrochemical dependency has implications that go beyond the economic issues already mentioned and increase threats to the possibilities of social reproduction.

In *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, it is the neighbouring landless young men or experienced members of the associations who are commonly in charge of agrochemical application on the rice fields. However, some like Emilio from *Patria Nueva* who cannot afford to contract labour, continue to fumigate on their own:

> You see, one has to be a little cautious in these matters, especially when you apply the *furarán* [colloquial name of an herbicide] ... The other liquids are strong, but not like before at least. Back then, there was something known as 'cypermethrin', that was such a powerful liquid. They said "let's use cypermethrin", but even I thought about it twice because it itched on the skin and it wasn't that the itch would go right away, nope! You had that itching on your body for two, three days. So, you have to avoid that by protecting yourself [by] using gloves, plastic shirt [to cover the body], and preventing contact with the skin. (Interview with Emilio Castro, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 4, 2019)

And, as Guillermo, the experienced rice producer from *Nueva Revolución*, states:

> The incidence of [agrochemicals] is very serious… I am almost a living testimonial of what is happening … I am suffering from chronic kidney failure, so I am on dialysis treatment. When I was younger, I fumigated with the agrochemical product, with chemical supplies, and all those things in the fields. For weeks, we fumigated evenings and mornings. I could feel how the product was stored in my body. So, that affected my health. First, my liver got complicated. I was hospitalized for two months.

When I asked how he could be sure that his failing health was caused by agrochemicals, he went on to say,

> Yes, at the Luis Vernaza hospital they treated my liver. So, they totally prohibited me from using inputs, right? They prohibited because I fell into an intrahepatic state. My body turned yellow and my whole body itched. From then

> on my health deteriorated step by step. (Interview with Guillermo Pineda, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019)

Similarly, Leonardo from the same association explains:

> I already poisoned myself with the inputs. Last year, they took me out from there [the rice fields], poisoned. The *muchachón* [young man] found me. Because he didn't show up to work, I put on the pump and started fumigating. I was lucky that he went inside and found me lying [on the ground] … since then, I pay others to fumigate. Because I already know that I can poison myself.
>
> The thing is that … they [other workers and peasants] already know what the work is like. They work here, they work there, they work all day. I don't know how they do it. (Interview with Leonardo, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019)

As these statements confirm, very basic precautionary measures have not been sufficient to protect association members as they have been poisoned by the intensive and regular application of herbicides and other chemicals in their rice fields. However, the effects on people's health are not only felt by those who use the agrochemicals and are directly exposed to them. Female members also reported problems arising from being physically close to rice fields while fumigation takes place. Isidra María, a member of the association *Ganaderos,* states:

> There is this liquid that is strong. When they're applying it, it seems to penetrate through the nose, and one feels how it numbs the mouth, the nose. But, he has to use it to kill the weed that can't be killed with other poisons of less intensity. He gets sick when he fumigates. He says "honey, this is strong, my vision is blurry" … and I need to prepare him a lemonade or frozen milk to have it pass.

When I asked if there is there something that can be done to counteract this situation, she responded,

> We have not done anything because my husband says that this is the only liquid that can be applied for that weed. If we don't apply it, what will we harvest? (Interview with Isidra María, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 12, 2019

Like Isidra María, other women prepare home remedies to prevent or alleviate the symptoms of intoxication that their partners display after fumigation. For example, Lucía from *Fe del Campesino*, shares her thoughts:

> There was this time when my husband fumigated with a strong poison…That was last year. He came back after having fumigated, he came back with a headache. He told me "I think the fumigation made me sick, make me a lemonade, make me something, I feel dizzy". He felt that way because that poison is very strong… After that, he didn't buy that poison again. I don't remember the name. (Interview with Lucía Miño, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 28, 2019)

According to these testimonies, those who are directly and indirectly exposed to agrochemicals most commonly experience headaches, dizziness, itchiness, vision problems, and in some cases, more serious illness. Moreover, these testimonies show that some women seem to accept the increasing reproductive work load in the form of caregiving and the added emotional burden as 'the cost' that has to be paid to guarantee family survival.

However, health issues are not the only consequences of the intensive use of agrochemicals in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. People also pointed to the contamination of nature, as Guillermo notes:

> Now, the contamination of the rivers, the water, you see, it's a disaster! It touches your heart to see it. For example, when the snail plague arrived here, they brought a product that killed that snail. But, it also killed all aquatic species, everything! Fish, shrimp, ..., how sad! The use of agrochemicals for agriculture is terrible, …, for me it is a terminal cancer. (Interview with Guillermo Pineda, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019)

Guillermo is referring to the snail pest that infested rice fields several years ago and how the herbicides that were used to combat it contaminated the water sources and killed all kinds of aquatic species that some used for family consumption. Also, JACG shares:

> When I lived in Durán, we had up to 37 pigs. This was already bothering the neighbors, that's why we needed to have land here. In all the time in Durán, none of the animals died. But the animals have died here in the hacienda. Having more space, they should be more comfortable, they should be better off. But they get sick, and we need to bring them to the veterinarian.
>
> [The sickness] may be due to the use of many chemicals. Just as it affects the plants, it also affects animals. Insecticides and pesticides are everyday products here. The animal is a living being. And I think that is also affecting us. We don't see it in the short term, but we will see it in the long term. It worries me. (Interview with JACG, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 29, 2019)

As JACG's statement illustrates, some women are acutely aware that water contamination from the intensive use of pesticides is harming their food crops, farm animals, and the fish that are part of their families' subsistence. When asked about environmental contamination, Mariana from the association *Emmanuel* states, "How can I not be worried about it? The environment is being damaged. We want to work in a different way to protect our land and the environment, and ourselves, because don't you see that we are in the environment" (interview with Mariana, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*,

May 7, 2019). Mariana's words reveal the increasing anxiety of women and men in the hacienda about the consequences of using contaminated water for both irrigation and household consumption. But the contamination of nature is also a consequence of other input-intensive agrobusiness practices that take place near the hacienda.

Drainage channels that cross several sites of the hacienda sweep away liquid and solid waste that comes from the neighbouring sugar cane, banana, and shrimp enterprises. Marcelina, a member of the *Fe del Campesino* association that shares borders with a sugar cane field, explains that during the two months of the dry summer season she needs to use water from a drainage channel for household consumption. She further explains, "the water is contaminated because the sugar cane producer uses strong chemicals. This water turns the plants yellow" (interview with Marcelina, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 28, 2019). Three associations -- *Rafael Brito Mendoza*, *Emanuel*, and *Victoria de Las Mercedes* -- share the same channel that drains the water that runs into the San Camilo estuary. Before flowing into the Gulf of Guayaquil, the estuary crosses the sites of associations *Patria Nueva* and *Nueva Revolución*, whose members use this water to irrigate their rice fields. Leonardo, a member of *Nueva Revolución* recalls that women of his association lost their rice harvest after irrigating with the 'black' water that flows into the San Camilo estuary. He affirms that "we reported the contamination [to the authorities] … yet, there has been no response" (interview with Leonardo, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, April 5, 2019). As Leonardo's statement confirms, while 'interconnected' contamination throughout the aquatic systems, due to the high dependency on herbicides in monoculture production, carries broad implications for peoples' ability to live in and from the land, it has not been recognized as a health and environmental hazard by public institutions and public opinion.

In sum, besides the economic dependency with the high risk of indebtedness, the extractive logic of rice production also results in health issues and environmental contamination with increasing women's care work and emotional burdens. The contaminated bodies and spaces of people on this rural estate are thus threatened with losing the very resources available for their reproduction in the long term.

The last section of this chapter explores some concrete ways in which women are challenging oppression in their productive and reproductive domains by building grounded and relational practices of food sovereignty.

3.4 Building grounded and relational food sovereignty from oppression

The interviews I conducted during my research reveal the importance of access to and control over land to guarantee the social reproduction of the families in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. Data provided by women and men indicate that once they settled the hacienda, mostly in 2009, they started to cultivate food crops, along with rice and other cash crops, and to engage in raising animals to signal their physical possession of the land and to guarantee subsistence for their families. Throughout 2019, I also participated in different activities organized by women in *Las Mercedes,* with the support of *Tierra y Vida*, where innovative agriculture practices were perhaps most visibly expressed and collectively shared. The importance of these practices became more evident when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, in the middle of the coastal rainy season, and social lockdown measures were imposed that affected peasants in the hacienda. For example, mobility restrictions hindered the availability of highland-produced essential foodstuffs, and the closure of the commercial outlets of agribusinesses restricted even more than before the access to technological kits (Observatorio para el Cambio Rural 2020). In what follows, I provide glimpses into how four women are organizing grounded practices of food sovereignty as a form of resistance to the oppressive conditions they face.

3.4.1 Expanding seed diversity and animal breeding beyond rice production

Blanquita, a woman in her sixties and a mother of four grown children, came from Guayaquil with her husband to *Hacienda Las Mercedes* to become a peasant. Getting access to land through her membership in the association *Patria Nueva* helped her to realize her dream of producing her own food and taking care of her health as well as her husband's. Blanquita is in possession of 5 hectares, with half of this area used for rice production. Since rice production does not generate enough income, she keeps working as a hairdresser in Guayaquil, where she spends the afternoons before she returns to the farm in the evening. During the past few years, small-scale food crop production and animal breeding have become a way to progressively move away from dependency on rice production and to look into alternative sources of income. On approximately 2.5 hectares, Blanquita and her husband plant more than 30 different kinds of seasonal crops, as well as some perennial food crops. In all this diversity, she is cultivating fruits like cherimoya, tamarind, guava, and guanabana, and even medicinal or sacred plants

and trees such as the *palo santo* (*Bursera graveolens*), which are difficult to find due to the intensification of monoculture farming in Guayas province.

While Blanquita and her husband bought rice and corn seeds from Ecuador's largest agrochemical company (AGRIPAC) and other agro-industrial outlets, most of the seeds for her food crops came from friends and family who live in other coastal provinces. Blanquita has increased her seasonal and perennial crop production by saving their seeds for replanting. Food crops have a variety of uses in Blanquita's household. Compared to cash crops such as rice, corn, and plantain that are mainly sold to intermediaries, if the harvests are good enough, the food crops are produced for the family's own consumption and to share with others. While food crops have a non-monetary value for Blanquita, she also aims to increase her own income by marketing them in the near future. Furthermore, some of Blanquita's crops, such as the neem tree fruit, in combination with other natural components, are used to make organic herbicides. Her interest in producing organic herbicides comes from Blanquita's expressed need to live in a healthy environment. Finally, crops such as corn, plantain, cassava, and squash are also used to feed the animals (pigs, ducks, and chickens) that she breeds on the farm, especially important under the restrictive circumstances imposed during the corona virus emergency.

3.4.2 Building rice field walls for food crops

In 2005, JACG, a single mother of five children in her fifties, arrived at *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, together with neighbours from Durán, the bedroom community of Guayaquil. Since her association, *Victoria de Las Mercedes,* received its collective land title in 2012, she has gained more security to work and live in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. Today, JACG has her main residence at this rural estate where she lives with two daughters, two granddaughters, and her elderly father. She lives off the unpaved road that leads to her assigned plot where she runs a little store that provides basic goods to locals, a store that she combines with agricultural activities. As JACG explains, her family took possession of land that was adapted by the former owners for rice production. When JACG and her family arrived, she recalls, they found that most of the rice infrastructure on their plot, such as irrigation channels, was in poor condition. Also, the plot she has been assigned is situated at a lower level to facilitate mechanization during the rice season. Thus, for the most part, the land was not suitable for farming products other

than rice. JACG recalls that the need her family had to produce food crops led them to start using the “muros”, or the embankments of the rice fields to grow food crops.

Although JACG’s and her father’s main activity has been rice production, they continue to cultivate food crops in the *muros*, a common activity among many peasants in the coastal area to make the most use of their small plots of land. JACG and her father have cultivated more than eleven different varieties of food crops, including fruit trees and medical herbs that they use for their own consumption. As JACG states: “While the production of rice has been contracted, the production in the *muros* has helped us a lot to feed our family, especially during this corona virus crisis” (online interview with JACG, April 25, 2020). Although this productive practice has been recognized as protection against the negative environmental impacts of monocultures and the lack of sufficient income, it has not received support from the Ministry of Agriculture. JACG sees the importance of engaging the younger generation in agricultural work. Her young daughter has become so attached to life in the rural area that she decided to become an agricultural engineer as a way of continuing to help JACG and her family.

Photo 3. 2 Subsistence production of corn at the rice field wall



Photo taken by author

3.4.3 Roadside markets and coastal peasant eateries

Rocío, a woman in her late fifties from the association *Fe del Campesino*, has managed to cultivate perennial as well as seasonal crops in addition to rice in the small plots that she and members of her family occupy and where she lives part time. She emphasizes that for her and her sisters, "basically, our work is not only rice, not only a single crop. We sow a bit of everything" (online interview with Rocío González, March 24th, 2020). Rocío produces food crops mainly for her family consumption and for friends who live permanently in Guayaquil's marginalized neighbourhoods. However, they manage to sell their excess production most of the time but at prices that do not correspond to what they have invested. This, of course, benefits intermediaries or traders who buy agricultural products from peasants to sell them at higher prices in the cities. She is well aware of the difficulties that small-scale farmers face since they do not have established market access. Thus, since the end of 2017, Rocío took the plunge to find alternative ways to market products in a collective space alongside the highway that connects Guayaquil with rural cities, such as Yaguachi or Milagro.

Rocío and her sisters set up market stalls where they sell corn and plantain, home-made tortillas and "*humitas*", a traditional Ecuadorian dish made from corn. As the location became popular, they decided to build a prepared food stall or *comedor* where they could offer more elaborate traditional *campesino* dishes while selling fresh produce. The idea was to add value to what they produced, and could not sell in regular markets by providing consumers direct access to the fresh produce they cultivated and the food that they prepared. After seven months, Rocío and her sisters decided to separate and to set up their own *comedores*. Rocío recognizes that, although the income has decreased, it still represents an important part of her earnings. Indeed, this initiative has allowed Rocío to generate an income that otherwise would have not been possible for elderly women since they face discrimination on account of their age. It has also provided opportunities to support her children's education. As a mother of eight, Rocío has the support of two of her daughters but she also invests in their undergraduate studies. In teaching them the work on the farm, she hopes to motivate them to get involved in agriculture and eventually take over responsibilities on the farm.

3.4.4 Innovating with organic rice

Raquel, a leader of the association *Victoria de Las Mercedes,* who became the *Unión Tierra y Vida* coordinator in 2011, lives in Durán with her family. She commutes between her home in Durán, Guayaquil, and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* to pursue her different tasks and responsibilities as a mother, grandmother, wife, leader, and rice producer. Raquel recalls that, despite its good intentions, the organic fertilizers promoted by the MAG through their *Escuelas de la Revolución Agraria*[47] were not appropriate for the production of rice. Furthermore, members of her association have not enjoyed continued support from the Ministry: "what we get [instead] from the MAG are talks by agro-industrial store [representatives] that come to us to promote their chemical and expensive products [fertilizers, herbicides]" (online interview with Raquel Silva, April 5, 2020). As a way of breaking from economic dependency on agro-industry and the negative effects of chemicals on her health, Raquel has embarked on the transition from conventional to organic rice production.

On about 15 hectares of land, which she shares with her brother and another male associate*,* Raquel has been innovating with different mixtures of organic materials for the preparation of organic fertilizers and herbicides. During the 2019 rice season, she used a mix of nettle, moringa, and other plants that provide important nutrients to the soil and the plants while protecting them from diseases. Furthermore, she also uses worm composting to strengthen the nutrients in the soil. Although she has put great effort into the preparation of organic inputs, rice seeds are also an important component of Raquel's emergent agro-ecological initiative. Raquel has been reusing and exchanging rice seed with other members of her association, and she is looking into ways of rescuing native rice seeds that are being displaced by commercial seeds. The marketing is a task that has been assigned exclusively to her by her male partners, due to the self-esteem and charisma she developed through her leadership role in the organization. However, Raquel is aware that organic rice producers deal with even more limitations than conventional rice producers. There is no market for organic rice. Raquel sees this as an important experience while she, like many other women in *Las*

[47] This was a training program promoted and implemented in the year 2011 by the Ministry of Agriculture for a short period and conducted by some young progressive technicians of the MAG that taught some associations about organic fertilizers.

Mercedes, dedicates a plot for a food crop garden where she sows seasonal crops for her own consumption.

Women's experiences in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* clearly demonstrate the significance and power of accessing land in their lives and for the different generations of their families. Building on the adversities they encounter in the extractive agricultural model, these cases are indicative of women's needs to develop autonomous, local forms of food production to feed themselves, their families, and close friends while protecting their health and environment. These are the kinds of everyday "culturally grounded, self-determined and resilient" practices (Figueroa 2015, 510) that build food sovereignty while also contesting the capitalist agricultural market and the related exploitation and oppression in the productive and reproductive domains. These experiences resonate with other testimonies collected through a series of interviews I conducted in my doctoral research about the notions of confidence and self-esteem that women develop through their practices of food sovereignty on their plots of land. This is of particular importance in the coastal region where historical patterns of women's subordination in the household are often accompanied by physical violence. Moreover, power construction on women's intimate domains is in turn generating women's capacities to start fostering alternative relations with the agricultural and food market and their related technologies and actors (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015). In this regard, women' experiences, despite the adversities they encounter, hint at the need to replace the productivity-and-profit oriented goals of capitalist agricultural markets with values of gender equity, and economic and ecologic justice that put the sustainability of life as the primary goal.

3.5 Conclusions

My research demonstrates that despite of the intended goal to promote food sovereignty, *Plan Tierras*, along with other agrarian policies, does not work in solidarity with, nor does it generate the conditions for, peasant association members to construct food sovereignty in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. Instead, by accessing land through *Plan Tierras*, the women and men of the associations are compelled to become economically dependent on the agri-business companies that control the technological and capital markets. Furthermore, without addressing persistent patriarchal structures embedded in corporate agriculture policies, associations, and households, the gender equity goal of

this land policy results in multiplying women's work load in their productive and reproductive domains.

This chapter also uncovered a crisis in the social reproduction of households, ensured mostly by women association members in the absence of adequate livelihoods derived from rice production and the lack of state support. It also made evident the role of a gendered social reproduction crisis in subsidizing an extractive and male-dominated mode of production in the long run. Indeed, my research demonstrates that, along with labour exploitation, the extractive and patriarchal process of corporate agriculture is poisoning the bodies of the men and women who live in and from the hacienda; it is contaminating essential resources for their production and reproduction, such as water sources, soil nutrients, and biodiversity.

Finally, the findings discussed in this chapter shed light on an important political implication for policy makers, academics, and social movements working on feminist dimensions of food sovereignty. Agrarian reforms continue to be critical in the Ecuadorian context as well as in the Latin American region, but they need to incorporate the existence of gender inequalities within households as well as women's contributions towards food sovereignty into their analyses and practices. Indeed, the critical importance of land for women's work and social reproduction is now more crucial than ever since the global pandemic spread to Ecuador in 2020. Peasants' persistent demand for land and women's on-the-ground production and market alternatives offer some hope for socially, economically, and ecologically just food systems in the province of Guayas. However, this can only occur with major political and cultural transformation necessary to achieve the gender equity goals of food sovereignty together with the desperately needed genuine agrarian reform in the region.

3.6 References Chapter Three

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Preface Chapter 4

This chapter digs more deeply into my third research question: how has a more gender-equal and social-inclusive approach affected autonomous peasant mobilization for food sovereignty in ways that challenge possible conflicting scenarios related to the extractive agricultural model. To answer this question, the chapter looks at the historical relation between peasant movements in the coast and the Ecuadorian state and the current mechanisms of patronage, and related violence and corruption, that are deployed through the land policy *Plan Tierras*. This chapter discusses how the inclusion of women in associations through *Plan Tierras* increased their political participation in administrative matters and advocacy work *vis-a-vis* the state, despite the multiple burden they faced observed in the previous chapter. Here, I discuss how their mobilization for land becomes criminalized as it challenges one of the pillars of oppression, namely, the patronage politics that continues to serve the political and economic interest of the dominant rural elite of the coastal region

Photo 4. 1 A woman preparing the soil in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*



Source: own authorship

4 Chapter Four: The criminalized struggle for seized land amidst patronage politics in coastal Ecuador: lessons learned for the Food Sovereignty movement

Abstract

This chapter examines peasant associations' mobilization for land on the seized *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, a rural estate in the coastal province of Guayas that was made available for distribution through the most emblematic policy implemented under the umbrella of Food Sovereignty in Ecuador. I argue that the relation between peasant associations and the state needs to be analyzed in light of the historic patronage politics that, along with institutionalized corruption and violence, has perpetuated the political and economic power of agrarian elites and staggering levels of land tenure inequity in Guayas province. This analysis demonstrates the specific ways in which the PAIS Alliance government wound up in conflict with the traditional political parties of the coastal region, while exercising its own patronage mechanisms for controlling peasant associations. I contend that peasant associations, with the strong participation of women leaders, are constructing a cultural politics through an openly declared -- but nevertheless criminalized -- mobilization that at an institutional level is challenging the patronage politics of a state that continues serving the interests of the dominant rural elite. This research on patronage politics posits challenges to be addressed by the food sovereignty movement, both in the Ecuadorian and regional context, to support the reconstruction of solidarity ties between coastal *montubios* and campesinos, and the highland indigenous peoples.

4.1 Introduction

More than a decade has passed since the food sovereignty movement in Ecuador, led by CLOC/*La Vía Campesina* organizations, mobilized to ensure that Ecuador's PAIS Alliance government would include food sovereignty as a goal in its new 2008 Constitution (Giunta 2014; Peña 2016). As a result, with regard to food production, Ecuador's normative and legal framework recognized the importance of cultural diversity, equitable distribution of productive resources, and the role of peasants and medium farmers, especially women. While initially euphoric about these changes, activist and academics of the food sovereignty movement in Ecuador now feel they

were deceived. As some have previously highlighted (Tilzey 2019; Daza 2020; Landívar 2021), a shift took place vis-à-vis an authoritarian state that emptied the political dimension of food sovereignty to advance instead towards an extractivist capitalist agenda. Agrarian-productivity-led policies implemented by the PAIS Alliance governments for more than a decade (2007-2021) expanded the power of middle and large-scale agri-business while promoting the incorporation of peasant associations into their corporate frameworks (D. Martínez 2015; Kay and Vergara-Camus 2018; Ospina, Hollenstein, and Latorre 2020). Meanwhile, many peasant movement leaders and their organizations akin to PAIS Alliance surrendered their autonomous and radical mobilization capacity in exchange for securing favors such as appointments to public office and being included in increased productivity and market-based agrarian policies and welfare programs (Giunta 2014; Henderson 2017; Clark 2017; Tilzey 2019; Daza 2020).

The relation between PAIS Alliance and food sovereignty social movements described for the Ecuadorian context was not an isolated event. As some have observed (Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017; Rosset and Barbosa 2021), in many cases, even the most radical organizations in Latin America compromised their mobilization capacities in return for political concessions made by the so-called pink-tide governments in the region. Some scholars (Claeys 2012; Edelman and Borras Jr. 2016; Trauger, Claeys, and Desmarais 2017) already warned about the demobilization of social movements as one potential risk of institutionalizing food sovereignty positing the need for pursuing radical practices towards social and political change. For instance, Lapegna's (2013, 2016) analysis of a peasant movement in the Argentine province of Formosa during the Kirchner administration points to dual pressure exerted on social movement leaders as they navigate between the expectations of economic benefits from their constituents (pressure "from below") and the reciprocity bonds that they are immersed in by receiving resources from the governments (pressure "from above"). However, as stated by Lapegna, more research is needed to better understand and construct theories around the processes and mechanisms of social movements demobilization within contexts of historic patronage (Lapegna 2013).

Patronage politics are by no mean a recent phenomenon attributable to the so-called leftist governments. Patron-client relationships initially referred to the bonds of subordination between landlords and Indigenous population that perpetuated themselves in the colonized world. Indeed, after the collapse of feudalism, Spanish and Portuguese

colonizers were encouraged to replicate patron-client relations on estates and plantations in the Americas and elsewhere to ensure minimum cost of production through cheap and servile work force (Hall 1974; Stavenhagen 2012). This coercive form of social control remained throughout the consolidation of the nation-states from the 19th century onwards. By and large, patronage relations initially indicated the unequal exchange of favours by powerful landlords in return for the servile obedience by weak peasants that forced the latter into a vicious cycle of debt, perpetuating dependency in the context of poor wages, restricted communication, and lack of possibilities for upward social mobility (Wolf 1966; Huizer 1969; Hall 1974). With changing socio-political contexts and market pressures of the late 19th and 20th centuries, political actors became more important in mobilising patronage networks for electoral support with promises of public jobs or policies, such as land reform (Weingrod 1968; Hall 1974).

In the case of Ecuador, historically, powerful landlords, who originally accumulated capital through coercive relations, cemented the hacienda system and constituted complex kinship networks through which they succeeded in maintaining their political power by reversing the most radical goals of the agrarian reform processes of the 1960s and 1970s (Guerrero 1980; Maiguashca and North 1991). Following Barrington Moore Jr. (1973), in his case study of the Ecuadorian coastal province of Los Ríos during the PAIS Alliance governments, Herrera (2013) identifies a process led by a reactionary coalition of powerful classes to strengthen the development of capitalism based on the historical articulation of the country to export markets. Herrera (2013) also emphasizes that, up to present day, "the '*Hacienda*' is not an imaginary figment from the past; it is present in daily relations and is part of structural conditions" (2013, 127). Today, a complex web of powerful dominant elites controls the economic and political realms through political parties that use patronage relations to mediate the interaction between society and state, thus constraining the political actions of peasant movements (Herrera 2013). Drawing on these insights, I seek to understand how mobilization for land in coastal Ecuador was partially silenced by the rural elite-permeated governments of PAIS Alliance that deployed culturally embedded patronage relations, along with corruption and violence, to pursue its extractivist agenda.

In this chapter, I look at the more than decade-long, and little known, mobilization for land by peasant associations on *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, a rural estate in the Ecuadorian coastal province of Guayas. The hacienda was seized from the Isaías,

one group of corrupt bankers responsible for the financial crisis in the late 1990s, and was made available for distribution through the land policy *Plan Tierras* (2009-2020).[48] Through this emblematic policy, the peasant associations that were set up by the state created space for the relatively equitable participation of women. Many of these associations in this rural state are affiliated with the regional peasant organization, *Unión Tierra y Vida,* which articulates the members' common interest in the legalization of their land. Being the province with the highest land concentration in Ecuador (Martínez 2014) and the center of the most powerful political and economic sector of the country´s agricultural export economy-related financial, commercial, and landed elites (authors), the distribution of seized land is of special relevance. Today, according to official data provided by the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG), it is in this province where most of the seized land - that could not be distributed by *Plan Tierras* in over a decade - is still available.[49] This becomes all the more important as the Isaías group threatens to repossess their properties. This research seeks to understand how this mobilization for land was partially silenced by the rural elite-permeated governments of PAIS Alliance that deployed patronage politics, along with corruption and violence, under the apparently favourable political and legal context of food sovereignty.

Here, I argue that the relation between peasant associations and the state needs to be analyzed in light of the historic patronage that, along with institutionalized corruption and violence, has perpetuated the political and economic power of agrarian elite family networks and staggering levels of land tenure inequity in Guayas province. This point of departure for my analysis is useful to understand the coercive conditions under which coastal peasant associations have mobilized for land and maintained a continuous resistance against the patronage politics embedded in the institutions responsible for *Plan Tierras*. I contend that peasant associations, with the strong participation of women leaders, are engaging in cultural politics through an openly declared —but nevertheless criminalized and stigmatized— mobilization that, at an institutional level, is challenging the patronage politics of governments that continue serving the interests of the dominant rural elite.

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[48] The full name was *Plan de Fomento del acceso a tierras de los productores familiares*. Plan Tierras was replaced in 2014 by the project *Acceso a tierras de los productores familiares y legalización masiva en el territorio ecuatoriano*.

[49] Official communication with Mgs. Oswaldo Massuh, managing director of Plan Tierras (MAG-ATLM-UIO-2019-0482, MAG-ATLM-UIO-2021-0019-OF, MAG-ATLM-UIO-2021-0256-OF).

I chose to focus my research on Guayas because, as a food sovereignty academic activist born in its capital, Guayaquil, I have worked closely with the peasant organizations based in this geographical region for several years. Also, I conducted my MA thesis research in this province, focussing on peasant strategies and the land market in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. This specialized knowledge of the site and my connections with peasant organizations for over a decade allowed me to conduct extensive and in-depth qualitative research for my doctoral research. In all, I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with social movement leaders and officials of state institutions responsible for *Plan Tierra*s in Guayas, and 34 interviews (17 women and 17 men) with members of 9 associations in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. I also reviewed various documents (letters, legal texts, and communications) and participated in multiple meetings and advocacy activities held in the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG) in Guayaquil throughout 2019 to understand how association member-leaders interact with public officials. My research methods and methodology pay special attention to gender balance and integrate, to the extent possible, the voices of female leaders within the mobilization for land.

The first part of this article addresses the history of patronage using the work undertaken by scholars who have analysed how peasant mobilization was determined by the relations between the rural elite and peasants throughout the specific stages of capitalist agricultural development in Guayas. The second section examines the *Tierra y Vida*-led mobilization for land from early 2000s onwards and how it was partly silenced through patronage mechanisms deployed by *Plan Tierras* officials, that along with the violence and corruption characterize state-society relations in Ecuador. The third part analyses the concrete forms of resistance used by peasant associations articulated in *Tierra y Vida* to challenge the mechanisms of patronage that they encounter in the struggle for land in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. The conclusions address the challenges that my research on patronage posits for the food sovereignty movement, both in the Ecuadorian and the international context.

4.2 Patronage relations: a brief historical review

The coercive nature of traditional patronage relations (Wolf 1966; Huizer 1969; Hall 1974) describe the features that evolved in the hacienda system on the Ecuadorian coast within the country's emergent capitalist state. Indeed, the expansion of cacao production

(1860-1920) in the Guayas river basin was made possible through the appropriation of vast fertile areas of Indigenous lands and their subsequent subordination into the labour-repressive hacienda system (Chiriboga 1980; Guerrero 1980; Larrea 2006; Maiguashca 2012). Within cacao haciendas, the labour force[50] remained tied through indebtedness incurred from the high-interest cash advances provided by the landlord (Guerrero 1980), similar to the debt peonage arrangements found all over the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas. Altogether, these arrangements cemented strong personal bonds of loyalty between the landlord and the workers, reinforced by the violence exercised against the labour force that was isolated on the estates (Uggen 1993). Thus, during the cacao boom, a powerful group of landlords – linked through family networks and economic interests with elites of bankers and merchants based in Guayaquil – succeeded in controlling a significant part of coastal land and its peasant population (Guerrero 1980). By the end of 19th century, this financial-commercial-landlord elite not only appropriated the lion's share of cacao export income, but they also exercised political power in the country's evolving capitalist state (Guerrero 1980). Subsequently, the long crisis of the cacao export economy (1925 -1950) created new conditions on former cacao haciendas,[51] based on rental agreements that did not, however, destroy existing patronage relations but did provide momentum for the emergence of the first peasant mobilizations (Uggen 1993; Guerrero 2016; Ibarra 2016).

Peasant mobilization against violent evictions and increasing rent demands by landlords represent important aspects of the period that encompassed the boom (1948-1955) and bust (1956-1968) of a new export commodity, bananas (Uggen 1993). At the same time, the emergence of new economic and political forces triggered by significant public investment in infrastructure opened possibilities for small- and middle-scale entrepreneurs, including peasants resident on former cacao haciendas, to benefit from expanded production of agricultural export commodities (Uggen 1993; Larrea and North 1997; Larrea 2006). Indeed, efforts to advance towards a democratic state

[50] In addition to the low-wage work provided by the *peón* and his family, the cacao hacienda system was based on the pre-capitalist labour relation known as the *redención* (Chiriboga 1980; Uggen 1993). In this system*, sembradores* (cultivators) and their families were assigned a plot of land for 4 to 7 years to clear the forest and plant cacao trees while cultivating subsistence crops for their families on small plots provided by the owners (Guerrero 1980; Chiriboga 1980; Uggen 1993).

[51] These new arrangements continued to structure wage labour relations with rent in kind. For a more detailed analysis, see Uggen (1993), Guerrero (2016), Ibarra (2016).

including the extension of the right to vote to marginalized sectors of the population, allowed for the emergence of new economic groups and their political participation (Ojeda S. 1983; L. North 1985; Larrea and North 1997). This particular period of the banana boom witnessed the emergence of political patronage. Emergent political actors became the new patrons and used patronage networks to exchange political rights of rural population for promises of state resources. However, in Guayas, the ability of the local powerful oligarchic families to effectively affect political patronage networks helped to maintain their interests despite the apparent greater representation of popular sectors in the political and economic spectrum (Ojeda S. 1983; Larrea and North 1997). This became evident through the agrarian reforms and related modernization process implemented during the Import-Substitution-Industrialization (ISI) development paradigm financed by the petroleum boom (1972-1982).

As elsewhere, agrarian reforms of the 1960s and 1970s in Ecuador were implemented with support from the U.S. Alliance for Progress to contain the radical mobilization for land. Powerful coastal groups linked to traditional landlords mobilized patronage networks and formed an interclass alliance with highland elites to penetrate the state's institutions, turning the redistributive process into a "counter" agrarian reform (North 1985; Larrea and North 1997). In his work in the Milagro zone in Guayas, Uggen (1993) argues that, by enforcing the Agrarian Reform Law of 1964, the objective of the military government (1963-1966) was to eliminate leftist influence within peasant movements. Indeed, the military succeeded in making peasant organizations dependent on state services by assigning the *Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización* (IERAC) with sole responsibility for organizing peasant cooperatives in order to manage their requests for land (Uggen 1993). This is not to deny the political significance of the cooperative model for peasant movements to counter the high level of violence and exploitation exercised by landlords (Herrera 2014), nor to negate the kinship and reciprocity networks that were formed by peasant families within some cooperatives (Guerrero 2016). However, in Ecuador historically, as exposed by Uggen (1993), cooperatives were not participatory institutions designed for the exercise of peasant agency. Rather, they were controlled by the state that used patronage arrangements to wrest autonomy from peasant organizations and ultimately to avoid land confiscation that would prejudice landlord interests. This was the case in the 1960s, and it was also true for the process of agrarian reform during the 1970s.

Prior to the second agrarian reform law of 1973, the fifth and last government of Velasco Ibarra (1968-1972), followed by the military government of Rodriguez Lara (1972-1976), introduced a Decree to ensure increased national rice supply amidst a production crisis. The leasehold-tenancy system on the rice haciendas was deemed precarious, and it represented an obstacle for the state's modernization objectives. Similar to the social relations of the cacao haciendas, tenants were tied by strong personal bonds of dependence on their landlord-patrons[52] while also being subject to landlord violence (Redclift 1978). As Redclift (1978) argues, peasant mobilization for the radicalization of the agrarian reform catalyzed Decree 1001 that abolished rice *precarismo* in the midst of much violent resistance by the most reactionary landlords. However, it was the revenues derived from the oil boom in the 1970s that ultimately allowed the state to take over this rural modernization process. It did so without putting at risk the private estates of the oligarchic groups that were managed efficiently while helping inefficient landowners to redirect their activities towards the modernization of their estates (Redclift 1978). Furthermore, by organizing and providing benefits selectively to less-radical and more efficient cooperatives, through access to land and credit, the state succeeded in neutralizing the more politically radical peasant organizations and tying all cooperatives into different sectors of the state bureaucracy (Redclift 1978).

As this brief historical review shows, powerful elites in Guayas, who originally accumulated capital through the coercive *Hacienda* system, succeeded in maintaining their political-economic power and benefit from the ISI modernization process. Through their capacity to mobilise political support through patronage networks and build interclass alliances, agrarian elite permeated state institutions and reversed the most radical goals of the agrarian reform processes (Larrea and North 1997). Legally mandated cooperatives were used as patronage mechanisms through which elite-penetrated governments were able to neutralize the radical demand for land of peasant movements and ultimately strengthen the economic and political control of the regional elite. For Larrea and North, "the functioning of the political system – not only its populist and clientelistic characteristics but also the elite's direct access to centres of decision making – made the development of local and national public institutional

[52] A significant number of rice *sembradores* were in debt with the landowners who were also the money-lenders and rice-mill owners at the same time (Redclift 1978).

capacities extremely problematic" (1997, 923). Indeed, this encouraged not only the growth of bureaucracy but pervasive corruption, as peasant loyalty (e.g. votes and the surrender of autonomous mobilization) was paid back with selective favours (Larrea and North 1997). The conservative modernization path described here had grave consequences in the midst of state withdrawal and structural adjustment programs that were implemented during the neoliberal era from the mid 1980s onwards.

During the 1990s, the class conflicts between large estate owners and peasants, and violent state and landlord responses became a continuing reality in Guayas. As documented by North, Kit, and Koep (2008), Guayas accounted for the largest number of rural violence incidents against peasant organizations carried out by the private armed guards of landlords, supported by local police and civil authorities, and covered up by a fragile and corrupt political-judicial system.[53] This led to staggering levels of land concentration (Martínez 2014), as well as massive migration to Guayaquil (Larrea 2006; Villacís and Carrillo 2012) where the majority of the province's displaced rural population has been absorbed and settled in a growing number of poor semi-rural slums. In addition, two neoliberal legal instruments are relevant for the further elucidation of this research. First, the Agrarian Development Law of 1994 that continued with the modernization process in agriculture while officially establishing the market as the principal mechanism to access land (Guerrero and Ospina 2003). Second, the Financial Institutions Law of 1994 that allowed bankers and related agri-businesses to mortgage their rural estates and grant themselves credit from their own financial institutions. In 1999, an unprecedented financial crisis began with the collapse of banks with repercussions that included the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Ecuadoreans. Under these conditions, the occupation of the haciendas abandoned by corrupt bankers with agribusiness interests seemed to remain the only survival strategy for many among the impoverished population of urban and rural Guayas.

It is this context that generated momentum for PAIS Alliance to promise the implementation of its most emblematic and patronage-based land policy, *Plan Tierras*.

[53] Their documentation is based on data compiled by the Ecumenical Human Rights Commission (CEDHU) and demonstrates the patterns of violence during 1990-2001.

4.3 *Plan Tierras* and the criminalization of *Tierra y Vida's* struggle for land

It was initially through their affiliation to the National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Organizations (*Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negra*s - FENOCIN) that coastal peasant organizations started to occupy the bankers' abandoned lands. In fact, from the middle of the 1990s until the mid-decade of the 21st century, coastal *montubios*[54] and afro-Ecuadorian organizations contributed to strengthening the political weight of FENOCIN as they led the growing struggle for land. However, ethnic fragmentation created in part by international agencies' prioritizing of Indigenous communities of the highlands (Bretón 2005), brought tensions between FENOCIN's national leaders and coastal grassroots organizations. In referring to this ethnical-political dispute, Johana Mayorga, a former leader of FENOCIN affiliated Peasant Organization Union of Quevedo (UOCQ) stated:

> The power within FENOCIN was configured so that the representative voices were those of Indigenous people. The problems of *montubios*, and specially, Afro-Ecuadorians were diluted... Any attempt to foster black and *montubios* leadership was restricted, but the presence of white mestizos was tolerated. This is my analysis after thirteen years of witnessing that conflict: by not thoroughly discussing our multicultural origins, this approach ended up creating divisions between ethnic groups. The organization has not been able to resolve the conflicts of racism within the organizations.
>
> This translated into power disputes within the economic and financial matters of the organization and discourses such as "we, Indigenous people bring the money, the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] give us the money" began to be used. This supported the idea of maintaining an Indigenous presidency, which ended up separating the coastal organizations. At that time, we were 6 organizations, but 5 of them ended up leaving except the UOCQ which decided to take on a role as mediator of the problem. Until now, the UOCQ continues to be part of FENOCIN while other organizations have been diluted. (Interview with Johana Mayorga, May 12, 2021)

In her statement, Johana clearly illustrates how the coastal organizations' struggle for land was weakened by the loss of political support beyond the coastal region. This was especially true with regard to their relations with other political articulation such as the Socialist Party of Ecuador and the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations

[54] *Montubio* is the term used by Ecuadorians to refer to the mixed-race groups with strong ties to the countryside of the coastal provinces of Los Ríos, Manabí, Guayas and El Oro. Although they do not claim communal ownership of land, the *Montubio* people and their collective rights were recognized in articles 56, 59 and 60 of the Ecuador's 2008 Constitution.

CLOC/Vía Campesina through which they had originally obtained through their participation in FENOCIN. Moreover, they were stung by the campaign of defamation orchestrated by the re-elected FENOCIN president, who denounced the leaders of the coastal organizations as land invaders and land traffickers, as nefarious as the institutions that were defending the interests of former coastal landowners-bankers at that time (interview with Milton Yulán, Guayaquil, July 3, 2019). Indeed, these years were marked by the increasingly violent confrontation with various public institutions, including the former Deposit Warranty Agency (since 2010 the Management and Implementation Unit, UGEDEP), that administered the seized assets and tried to push peasants off the land (Landívar and Yulán 2011). In 2006, the coastal organizations established the *Unión Tierra y Vida* (Union for Land and Life) to continue their struggle for land under a new regional peasant organization.

The struggle for the seized land, like many other social struggles at the time, found expression in Rafael Correa's presidential campaign of 2005. Later, as president in 2008, he publicly declared "the land of the corrupt bankers for the peasants" as part of his agrarian revolution agenda. To a significant extent, the president's declaration emerged out of the rapprochement that *Tierra y Vida* had with important figures in the new government who also maintained good relationships with peasant organizations. Thus, in 2008, PAIS Alliance announced the execution of *Plan Haciendas*, the pilot plan for distributing 32 seized estates that had been occupied by peasant organizations, most of them affiliated to *Tierra y Vida*. A year later, *Tierra y Vida* played a leadership role in the launch of this pilot program by bringing together approximately 8,000 peasants on *Hacienda La Leopoldina* in Guayas. *Plan Haciendas* was replaced by the *Plan Tierras* in October 2009, broadening the territorial impact of the state redistributive project by adding other distributive goals, such as the expropriation of private land and the titling of Indigenous territories.

This redistributive agrarian project in Ecuador's post-neoliberal era was launched in accord with the constitutional and legal framework related to food sovereignty. Paradoxically, the possibility of expropriating the lands of large private estates was restricted by the same legislation under which this land policy was implemented,[55] giving more political relevance to the distribution of seized land. *Plan*

[55] Not only the neoliberal Agrarian Development Law of 1994, but also the subsequent, Organic Law for Rural Lands and Ancestral Territories implemented in

Tierras was also linked to the government's overarching rural development approach for which, similar to former agrarian reform initiatives, peasants were organized into associations by the state. As before, the direct state interference in associations had important implications for the autonomous organizational capacity of peasants who were reclaiming seized land. As noted by *Tierra y Vida,* the top-down approach and vague qualification parameters made the decision of granting membership status and benefiting the associations dependent on the biased discretion of *Plan Tierras* officials, thus creating conflicts within and between associations (Landívar and Yulán 2011). In contrast to former agrarian reforms (Phillips 1987), however, *Plan Tierras* required that associations include women heads of families as beneficiaries. This undoubtedly provided momentum to the struggle for seized land that women were leading in *Tierra y Vida* and evidenced the importance they placed in the mobilization (interview with Milton Yulán, Guayaquil, July 3rd, 2019).

Nonetheless, *Plan Tierras* also threw *Tierra y Vida* into the eye of the hurricane, resulting in violent confrontation with other powerful actors. From 2009 onwards, while legal proceedings against the peasant organizations continued, well-known land traffickers linked to traditional oligarchic political parties from Guayaquil became involved in the invasion of lands that were in the possession of *Tierra y Vida* associations. Between November 2009 and July 2011, this confrontation led to the assassination of five peasant leaders, executed by contract killers who to date continue to enjoy impunity. As Landívar and Yulán (2011) document, this eruption of violent confrontations resulted from the demagogic[56] way in which the public agencies responsible for *Plan Tierras* were handling the issue of seized land. This included promises to provide land to associations that in fact did not exist, unleashing competition for land among the associations of *Tierra y Vida* and land traffickers. *Tierra y Vida* repeatedly and publicly denounced the increased levels of violence and corruption among the public officials responsible for carrying out *Plan Tierras*. These denunciations led to serious problems for the organization, as Raquel Silva indicates:

> In *Tierra y Vida* we had a difficult problem, a murder. In fact, since 2010 we were having leaders assassinated by landowners who wanted to get their lands back. On July 21, 2011, the nephew of lawyer Yulán was murdered below the

2016 contained legal barriers for the expropriation of private land. For a detailed and comprehensive analysis, see Landívar and Yulán (2016).

[56] In this context, I used the word demagogic to refer to the false promises used by officials to gain political support while implementing *Plan Tierras*.

> offices of *Tierra y Vida*. It was never known who the murderer was. I investigated on my own. From prison they told me: "Raquelita, don't ask!" Then I was silent. It was in that year that I became stronger. We know that we have to be careful. (Ponce and González 2021)

As mentioned by Raquel, the assassination of Marlon Yulán, the nephew of the organization's legal coordinator in July 2011 was the event that marked an important turning point for *Tierra y Vida*.

Others have argued that Rafael Correa promoted a policy of cooptation and taming of social movements by turning citizens "into passive and grateful recipients of the leader's benevolent and technocratically engineered redistributive policies" (De La Torre 2013, 45). In the case of *Tierra y Vida*, *Plan Tierras* officials had the exclusive capacity to organize and provide benefits to those associations aligned with their interests and to make promises to settle their land demands separately. By doing this, they were trying to convince peasant leaders to abandon the radical, and dangerous, position of *Tierra y Vida* that questioned the corrupt management of public policy, and to coopt the peasant mobilization to gain political support. It was in this context that nine associations separated from *Tierra y Vida* and, in 2013, founded the Network of Peasant and Communal Organizations United for Living Well *(Red de Organizaciones Campesinas y Comunas Unidas por el Buen Vivir*), along with other coastal organizations. The Network served as a political support base for the PAIS Alliance at specific moments. For instance, the Network intervened publicly in 2015, during the mobilization led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) against the government's proposed water law, in the midst of rampant persecution and criminalization of social protest at the time. The Network questioned the Indigenous mobilization as an attempt to destabilize the government and threatened to call a counter-march – that ultimately did not take place - to defend what they called the advances made under the government of Rafael Correa (*El Universo* 2015).

In contrast to other studies (Martínez 2014; Henderson 2017; Clark 2017; Tilzey 2019), this section sheds light on a more complex picture of the land mobilization in Guayas during the post-neoliberal period of PAIS Alliance. Indeed, land continued to be a central demand for hundreds of thousands of landless people, living amidst outrageous social inequality and generalized impoverishment in urban and rural settings. However, from its very outset, the struggle for seized land led by *Tierra y Vida* was stigmatized, legally persecuted, and physically repressed by state institutions that served the interests

of the dominant groups of the province, the family networks of landlords, bankers, and merchants. Thus, the old patrons, who were challenged with a loss of political support and economic interests, initially deployed cruder and overt forms of violence against peasants' mobilization for seized land. This illustrates the coercive inherent characteristic of patronage when new actors emerge in the political arena and erode traditional patronage arrangements. However, as I have shown, the new patrons and their brokers, PAIS Alliance and *Plan Tierras* and related institutions, deepened this violence by making unachievable promises that exacerbated the competition for land with other groups, including squatter groups known for their ties with traditional agrarian elite political parties. Moreover, as was the case with former agrarian reforms, PAIS Alliance managed to interfere in the autonomous organizational capacity of peasant associations and fracture the radical land struggle by divorcing an important number of peasant associations from *Tierra y Vida* to build its rural political support.

I now turn to the *Tierra y Vida* associations in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* to analyse how peasants associations are challenging patronage politics at a local level through radical actions and proposals vis-à-vis the land policy officials and in the midst of the hostile environment created by PAIS Alliance governments.

4.4 *Hacienda Las Mercedes*: land demand and resistance against patronage

Las Mercedes is a 2,000-hectare rural estate that was a property of the Isaías Group[57], one of the bank-owning/landlord families that benefited from the liberalisation of the financial market implemented in 1994 and that eventually led to 1999-2000 financial system collapse. While it was the property of the Isaías Group, *Las Mercedes* was divided into four sites, each of them administered by one of four companies, namely, *Jugom*, *Agrícola Las Mercedes*, *Lamiper,* and *Mariba*. When this rural estate was abandoned after the bank crisis in the early 2000s, it began to be occupied, first by former workers who lived in the hacienda or surrounding villages, and shortly afterwards, by landless people from the poor neighbourhoods of Guayaquil and the city of Durán as well as rural towns such as Yaguachi, Samborondón, and Daule. These groups established the first associations in the rural estate, namely *Atara*, *Nueva Revolución*, *Victoria de Las Mercedes*, and *Félix Mora León* and, with the support of

[57] In total, the state seized 95 companies and other properties in the hands of the Isaías Group (Landívar 2015).

Unión Tierra y Vida, started to demand the expropriation of *Las Mercedes* by the former National Institute for Agrarian Development (INDA) (Landívar 2015).[58] As in the case of other abandoned rural estates, from the very outset, the distribution process in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* was characterized by violent conflicts and insecurity of tenure on this valuable land located just minutes away from the cities of Durán and Guayaquil.

In 2010, *Las Mercedes* was transferred to the Deposit Warranty Agency – an institution shortly afterwards replaced by the Management and Implementation Unit (UGEDEP) - that appointed active duty army personnel to act as the temporary custodians of the estate (Landívar 2015). At the same time, false expectations around the *Plan Tierras* triggered the occupation of *Las Mercedes* by groups led by well-known land traffickers who were linked to the Social Christian Party, the right-wing political party led by traditional oligarchy of Guayaquil (Landívar 2015). Thus, the associations in possession of land were caught between two powerful political actors: on the one hand, the Deposit Warranty Agency that, with the support of the military, was trying to evict the associations by any means; and on the other hand, land traffickers that brought groups of people from Guayaquil to violently invade the occupied land. Rocío, one of the most prominent female leader of *Tierra y Vida* today, admitted that at that time she did not know that she had become involved with an association led by land traffickers. She shares her experience when she entered the hacienda:

> We began to go to the meetings of *Patria Nueva*. There we started hearing that we had to give money. These weren't the five dollars we pay here in the association for the paperwork. There it was two hundred, three hundred dollars minimum. And those who wouldn't pay, well, they'd tell them "you leave". And if you wouldn't leave, they would knock down your house and do things to make you leave. Then we began to realize that things were not as we thought. We realized that we had fallen into the hands of invaders and if we did not want to lose the land we had to submit to their will.
>
> We entered [the hacienda] with Mrs. Cristina Ponguillo [well-known land trafficker of Guayaquil] but this area was occupied by the *compañeros* of the [association] *Félix Mora*. They didn't want us to stay here, so they made war on

[58] While conducting my MA research, I found out that in 2008 these four associations maintained agreements with the former administrator (also known as a *mayordomo*) to cultivate the different sites of the abandoned hacienda. A single person was occupying part of the sites and created later the association *San Marcos*, and the company CapExport. The association *Ex-Trabajadores*, whose members were mostly former workers of the hacienda, was not yet constituted as an association.

> us, yep! They claimed their possession of the land. We had quite a few problems with them. There was an eviction requested by them. It was not addressed directly to us individually, but rather it was for the association of "la Ponguillo" they said. But we paid the piper. They knocked down and burned our houses, they set it on fire and we claimed crying, “don't knock our houses down”, we told them, but nothing. This was a chaos!
>
> Then at one point we couldn't stand it anymore, because it was a lot of pressure. We decided to separate from the *Patria Nueva* association. So now they [the land traffickers] declared war on us. Now they came to burn our houses, they robbed us, they did stupid things to us so that we would leave and they would keep this land. But we had *compañeros* who were very tough.
> A few years passed and I met a *compañero*. He told me: “I already spoke with the legal coordinator and he can help you”. So, I asked if I could join *Tierra y Vida* to fight together for the land. So, they told me that it was the leaders who decided whether to welcome us or not. Then we all talked, then Carlos Reyes, who was president at the time [and a member of the association Félix Mora], spoke and said "I have no problem with that [letting them join *Tierra y Vida*] and if they want, we are here to fight together." Since then we began to know each other little by little, to be friends and unite in the fight. Of course, there are still scars from so many things we've been through. But in the end, everyone's goal is that they give us the land. (interview with Rocío Gonzáles, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 29th, 2019)

Testimonials collected during my field research depict not only the traumatic experiences of the association members during this violent time conducted by the army and the Deposit Warranty Agency, as well as land traffickers who took advantage of poor and landless people.

This situation changed with the strong response against invasions launched by the PAIS Alliance government to undermine the power of the Social Christian Party squatter groups from Guayaquil, and the elimination of UGEDEP in 2015[59] that resulted in the departure of the military from the hacienda. However, this completed only one of many conflictive chapters in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, as I will describe below.

[59] Following the *Ley Orgánica para el Cierre de la Crisis Bancaria de 1999* (Organic law for the end of the bank system crisis) of February 2014, PAIS Alliance eliminated the UGEDEP and transferred unfinished administrative processes related to seized properties to the Central Bank in June 2015 (Decreto Ejecutivo 705).

Table 4. 1 Land tenure and legal situation of *Hacienda Las Mercedes*

Sites	Hectares	Associations	Members	Hectares/ Member	Type of Tenure Conflicts	Legal Situation
Las Mercedes	198	*Atara*	74	2.6	Associative land title but part of the site was (and is still) occupied by another association	The Deposit Warranty Agency (later UGEDEP) sold these sites to the MAG, that were then bought by the associations in 2012.
Jugom	460	*Rafael Brito Mendoza*	35	4.74	Shared associative land title. MAG opposes the division of *Jugom* to the three associations	
		Emmanuel	31	3.5		
		Victoria de Las Mercedes	43	4.23		
Mariva/ Lamiper	213	*Nueva Revolución*	42	5.07	In possession without land title. *Nueva Revolución* land was invaded by *Asovacon*	Although these sites were in the hands of the UGEDEP, they were not transferred to MAG until 2014.
	207	*Patria Nueva*	74	2.80		
	68	*Fe del Campesino*	43	1.58		
	250	*Ex Trabajadores*	46	5.43		
	472	*Felix Mora Leon*	73	6.47		
	214	*San Marcos*	Land cultivated by a person under the administration of the Deposit Warranty Agency (later UGEDEP) and the military, who later created the association San Marcos to benefit from the land policy			
Total	**2,082**					

Source: Unión Tierra y Vida archives

Table 4.1 summarizes the land tenure structure for the two different legal situations of the seized sites that compose *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. First, the two sites, *Las Mercedes* and *Jugom,* were already in the hands of the former UGEDEP when they were sold to four associations in 2012, but both continue to face conflicts and irregularities that have yet to be addressed. The association *Atara* received an associative land title for the site *Agrícola Las Mercedes*, but a part of it had been and still is occupied by another group. And although three associations —*Victoria de Las Mercedes*, *Emanuel*, and *Rafael Brito Mendoza*— were granted a shared land title for the *Jugom* site*,* the borders between them were not clearly demarcated by *Plan Tierras*. Second, the *Mariba* and *Lamiper* sites, although in hands of the UGEDEP, were only transferred to the MAG for its distribution after the elimination of the UGEDEP in 2015. These sites have not yet been distributed to the five associations of *Nueva Revolución*, *Patria Nueva*, *Fe del Campesino*, *Ex-Trabajadores*, and *Félix Mora,* whose members have been in *de facto* possession for several years; indeed, as mentioned earlier, they had requested the distribution of the two sites even before *Plan Tierras* was introduced. As I explain in the next subsections, association members in *Las Mercedes*, with and without legal title, have engaged in an ongoing multi-year struggle with state institutions responsible for *Plan Tierras* to overcome the elite-sponsored patronage

politics in which the state implements the land policy and ultimately blocks their right to land.

It is worth highlighting the leadership taken by women in this struggle. Indeed, the requirement of *Plan Tierras* to include a female quota of 30% of the total association membership allowed women to assume formal leadership roles and carry out various tasks related to organizational matters, including advocacy work *vis-a-vis* state institutions. Women I interviewed spoke of the numerous challenges that this represented given the historical cultural perceptions about women's expected roles in a coastal rural society, marred by patriarchal relations of power and conditions of structural poverty.[60] This helps to explain the unequal conditions under which women, compared to their male counterparts, are leading the land struggle in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*.

The next section explores how peasant associations in this rural estate, with the support of *Tierra y Vida,* are mounting an organized resistance that consists of different tactics *vis-à-vis* the state to denounce the multiple mechanisms of patronage, corruption, and violence displayed by public officials.

4.4.1 Colluding private interests with state-aligned associations

In 2009, *Las Mercedes* Association leaders complained about the performance of a former *Plan Tierras* head officer, who in 2015 issued an order for the expulsion of the five associations that were based in the *Mariba* and *Lamiper* sites. The eviction order was issued despite the fact that the five associations in possession of land had signed a notarized agreement with the very same *Plan Tierras* official in 2014, an agreement that recognized them as the legitimate beneficiaries and owners of the land. As a result, *Tierra y Vida* engaged in a 4-year-long administrative battle and advocacy work that eventually led in 2019 to the successful reversion of the decision that the association members considered to be illegal, due to multiple irregularities. This conflict not only delayed the transfer of the *Mariba* and *Lamiper* sites to the five associations, it also contributed to another series of conflicts arising from the invasion of the lands of *Nueva Revolución* Association members by another association called *Asovacon.* Magna Vera, then president of *Nueva Revolución*, denounced the lack of response to approximately

[60] See Chapter Three for an analysis of the radical transformation that women experienced while assuming more responsibilities without specific measures to address relations of gender inequality within their associations and households.

30 letters submitted to the MAG that clearly highlighted severe abuses committed by the *Asovacon* association – including the use of heavy machinery to destroy her association's crops.

More recently, *Plan Tierras* pressed *Tierra y Vida* to accept a distribution proposal for the *Mariba* and *Lamiper* sites. The proposal reduced the amount of land originally assigned to the *Nueva Revolución* and *Fé del Campesino* associations to include the invading association *Asovacon*. The *Plan Tierras* proposal also involved compensation for the land taken from the *Fé del Campesino* association with land from another association, *Patria Nueva*. According to a leader of the association *Patria Nueva*, the proposal will undoubtedly create confrontations and divisions between the associations that, to date, had been working together to obtain land. She goes on to say: "We have suffered so much while maintaining possession over thirteen years. It is not fair that they give the land to an association that has not been involved [in the process of] land occupation" (online interview with Otilda Zurita, November 1, 2020). Furthermore, according to the law, *Asovacon* cannot be a beneficiary of the land policy since there are several unresolved complaints against this association, complaints arising from its conflictive possession of land[61]. Turning a blind eye to such illegalities to favour *Asovacon* suggests the very real possibility of collusion between public officials and the invading groups.

For several years, *Tierra y Vida* associations have been demanding the recovery and distribution of the land currently occupied by the association *San Marcos*. This is an association that was created by a well-off farmer and agri-business investors in order to benefit from the land policy; he rented the 1,000 hectares of the site when it was administered by the military. Nevertheless, *Plan Tierras* officials remained deaf to these associations' counter proposal despite previous agreements to consider this possibility. Instead, they are arbitrarily moving ahead with the distribution process of the disputed sites without the associations' consent, thereby benefiting associations with questionable backgrounds linked to wealthy and powerful local agribusiness interests.

[61] According to the Land Law, only persons or organizations that demonstrate the peaceful and uninterrupted possession of land can request its ownership.

4.4.2 Weakening state institutions in charge of land issues

The Sub-secretariat of Land and Agrarian Reform (SSTRA) is the institution ultimately responsible for the evaluation and land grant processing prepared by *Plan Tierras* officials. The SSTRA inherited numerous inconsistencies in awarding land that arose from decisions that had been made by the former institution responsible for land distribution, INDA (interview with Luis Velarde, Quito, September 4, 2019). Furthermore, since its creation, SSTRA has been criticized for the successive replacement of Sub-secretaries, leading to the further accumulation of unresolved land conflicts (Landívar and Yulán 2011). Despite these difficulties, *Tierra y Vida* maintained direct dialogue and advocacy with SSTRA's officials throughout the years since its creation. This relation, however, has deteriorated due to the reorganization of the MAG in 2018. Indeed, the PAIS Alliance government of Lenin Moreno (2016-2021) initiated an aggressive austerity plan to deal with the financial crisis that was created by the bust in petroleum export prices from 2013 onwards, and from the corruption and inefficiency prevalent in public institutions during the Rafael Correa administration.

With the Moreno government's restructuring, the SSTRA was renamed to become the Sub-secretariat of Lands and Ancestral Territories (Ministerial Agreement 093)[62]. Clearly, the elimination of "agrarian reform" from the Sub-secretariat's name is indicative of the fact that even the half-hearted distributive efforts that had been implemented in previous years were now over. The restructuring of the Sub-secretariat centralized its functions in the national capital, Quito, closing all four regional offices, including the one in Guayaquil. Instead, a MAG district center was created, headed by a district director who became the MAG's direct representative in the province. With this measure, the new MAG district office in Guayas accumulated multiple responsibilities, including the resolution of land conflicts that were previously in the hands of the Sub-secretary. The implications of this restructuring were evident from the very outset.

During my field research from late 2018 through 2019, four different directors were in charge of the Guayas district office. Moreover, the financial crisis faced by the state led to the reduction of the budget available to the MAG, restricting even further the inadequate budget for the functioning of the MAG Guayas district office. In January 2019, associations questioned the insufficient technical resources and personnel with

[62] Estatuto Orgánico de Gestión organizacional por procesos del MAG.

experience for dealing with conflict resolution and with specialized knowledge of agrarian law in the MAG Guayas district office. In effect, this inept MAG office generated great uncertainty among members of the associations regarding the state institution's capacity to respond in a timely manner to their needs and to resolve outstanding land conflicts. With its overextended responsibilities and lack of budget, the associations argued that the newly reorganized Sub-secretariat was likely to further delay responses to the petitions of the associations, in addition to creating more conditions for corruption (Press release *Tierra y Vida,* Guayaquil, January 21*,* 2019)[63]. As the legal coordinator of *Tierra y Vida* clearly puts it, "weak institutional structures lend themselves to corruption as powerful individuals continue to pay public officials to make sure that their concerns receive priority" (interview with Milton Yulán, Guayaquil, July 3rd, 2019).

On April 2019, approximately 150 peasants affiliated to *Tierra y Vida* gathered in Guayaquil to demand answers to over 20 conflict resolution petitions. The associations entered the MAG district office and demanded that the then director meet with them to explain his lack of prompt and effective response to their demands. According to the peasants, the delays evidenced the lack of both institutional capacity and political will on the part of the MAG director and his legal staff to resolve even the simplest of cases. A peasant shouted out his frustration: "we are asking you only to provide copies of documents. What do you need to deal with this petition? Perhaps, you need money like the other public officials?" (participant observation notes, April 15th, 2019). Ensuring that a large number of members attend meetings with public officials have been an important tool used by *Tierra y Vida* to exert pressure on state institutions while ensuring the transparency of associations in an environment characterized by corruption. However, as might be expected, such gatherings are not well received by officials when associations challenge their performance. *Plan Tierras* officials object to the fact that associations come to the meetings in large groups since dealing with so many people is time consuming and complicated (interview with Oswaldo Massuh, Quito, September 4, 2019). Since the state of emergency was decreed in March 2020 due to the global pandemic and the resulting restrictions on human mobility, conflict resolution petitions have not received any response at all.

[63] The new MAG structure eliminates the SSTRA in provinces and further restricts the resolution of conflicts, especially in the coastal provinces of Guayas and Los Ríos.

4.4.3 Punishing associations for the rigid conditions of a half-baked land policy

Associations that bought the land from the UGEDEP in 2012 have gone through complex legal and financial arrangements with the MAG and BanEcuador (former National Development Bank). Rather than directly purchasing the land, the associations purchased bonds[64] created by the former Deposit Warranty Agency after the financial crisis of 1999-2000 in order to guarantee the funds that were owed to individuals for the loss of their assets in the failed banks. By purchasing bonds, the associations were treated like other commercial purchasers of seized properties and subordinated to conditions derived from the need to recover public funds that were used to bail out the banking system. The mortgage agreement with the MAG and BanEcuador included severe punitive clauses characteristic of neoliberal bank business policies, clauses that contradicted the principles of a popular and solidarity economy allegedly pursued by PAIS Alliance governments (Landívar 2015). Furthermore, over the last nine years, the inconsistencies and contradictions in the mortgage agreements immersed the associations in a never-ending administrative process with state institutions.

Photo 4. 2 Women at the front of a meeting with former Sub-secretary of Land and Territories



Photo taken by the author, Ministry of Agriculture office, Guayaquil, May 14th, 2019.

[64] CPGs is the acronym for Certificados de Pasivos Garantizados.

The various meetings that were held with public officials throughout 2019 included those associations that had received an associative title in 2012 at the *Jugom* site –namely *Victoria de las Mercedes*, *Emanuel*, and *Rafael Brito Mendoza.* These associations have been demanding *singularización*, i.e. the division of their shared land title into three parts, since the shared title prevents them from receiving associative credits from financial institutions. It was only in 2019, after a multi-year legal struggle, that the MAG recognized the lawful viability and validity of the site division. Nevertheless, the *singularización* has not been processed due to the bureaucratic burden that the MAG has not been able to resolve. This has affected the associations' capacity to cultivate the land collectively and pay the mortgage, and thus, they found themselves in arrears in early 2016. As a result, the payment arrangements were restructured in 2017 allowing up to a two-year grace period. To put this into perspective, *Tierra y Vida* had been consistently requesting that the debts acquired by the associations for the land they bought in 2012 be forgiven. Yet, as Raquel Silva, coordinator of *Tierra y Vida,* observes "since COVID-19 started, the government has granted extensions or even forgave the debts of the agro-business companies, but we, the peasants, have not gotten anything yet" (online interview with Raquel Silva, November 2, 2020). Indeed, in 2020, in the middle of the emergency situation triggered by the pandemic that disproportionately affected rural populations, the associations were asked to pay the mortgage instalment that was due to the MAG.

The state's punitive logic is the iron-clad fist of the patronage-based land policy. The following statement of the managing director of Plan Tierras, Oswaldo Massuh, is useful for understanding how this is deeply rooted in the narrative and practice of *Plan Tierras* officials:

> The requirements with which the [beneficiary] associations were evaluated focused more on the socioeconomic conditions of the members. [For example], that they do not exceed a certain net worth, that they do not exceed a certain level of income and that they are recognized in the SEPS [Supervisory Office of the Popular and Solidarity Economy]. But there was no —or there is no— specific standard that tells you how to measure the organizational strength and that this can be a reason to deny access to land. [However], we do delay the processes when this type of conflict exists or when we see organizations that are not strengthened. This is because we already know from the beginning that by handing over land, the associations are not going to work the land together. Most of the time, the associations are formed only because the law tells them that the redistribution is in favor of an association. But in practice, especially in the coast because in the highlands this works differently, when you receive land, you divide it into parcels and each person works on their own property and when it is your

> turn to pay, each person contributes their part. So that is what we have evidenced in the execution of the project. There is a need to rethink it once the project is institutionalized through the National Land Fund or through another institution. (Interview with Oswaldo Massuh, Quito, September 4, 2019)

For Raquel Silva, it all adds up to being the different forms of violence exercised by the state:

> Violence is not giving you what you demand —and what you have demanded— by right. Violence is not processing all the complaints that one has filed. Violence is not being able to work with dignity. Violence is not responding to your requests. Violence is wanting to impose chemicals on your plot when you no longer want to. Violence is the treatment you receive in the commercialization because they [merchants] do not pay you the real value of your product but a lower the price. Unfortunately, we live here in a sea of violence and corruption in Ecuador. This was [the case with] the previous [administration] and it has worsened with this government. (Interview with Raquel Silva, Guayaquil, July 3, 2019)

As Raquel eloquently states, the delay in resolving the bureaucratic entanglements created by *Plan Tierras* is another form of violence against the associations. And it raises fear and resentment among their members. Indeed, there is a collective belief that powerful actors are trying to block the distribution process. As a member of *Patria Nueva* states, "we are afraid that suddenly, the big sugar cane, banana, or shrimp companies will come, pay for these lands, and order the military to evict us from the land" (interview with Victor Hugo, *Las Mercedes*, March 25, 2019). Also, fear of being evicted on account of the pressure exerted by former landowners is generalized -- "people say that the Isaías are going to come soon and will ask for their properties back" (interview with Norma Vargas, *Las Mercedes*, April 11, 2019). In fact, following a decision of the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2016, a national court has recently requested the recovery of the Isaías Group former properties seized by the Ecuadorian state[65]. The irregularities present in the legal process against this bank-owning/landlord family and the half-baked land policy clearly indicate how the oligarchic groups continued to maintain the political control of public institutions during the governments of the PAIS Alliance. The fear of losing their land is mixed with a sentiment of indignation as members of the associations feel that they have been shoved aside by the state: "I do not think the state has the [political] will to distribute

[65] The resolution CCPR/C/116/D/2244/2013 of the Human Rights Committee releases the Isaías Group from any responsibility in the financial crisis of 1999-2000 (see https://casoisaias.com/PDF/ISAIAS%20-%20UNHR%20Committee.pdf).

the land to the peasants" (interview with Carmelo Cedeño, *Las Mercedes*, May 16, 2019).

4.5 Conclusions

The historical review that begins this chapter demonstrated that patronage relations established by powerful agrarian elite family networks, a heritage of colonial times, have persisted throughout the different stages of capitalist agricultural development in Ecuador. Indeed, in the same way that legally mandated cooperatives were controlled during the agrarian reforms processes of the 1960s and 1970s, the creation of associations to benefit from the state-sponsored land policy *Plan Tierras* was used to coopt the peasant mobilization for seized land and to neutralize *Tierra y Vida's* radical position that questioned the patronage-based management of this policy. Neither the incorporation of progressive officials, from time to time in charge of the institutions responsible for *Plan Tierras* in the central government, nor the good intentions to redistribute seized land while promoting gender balance and food sovereignty could alter the power dynamics and the coercive practices of local micro-oligarchies. Today, the use of family and patronage networks in Guayas succeeds in protecting the class interests of the bank-owning-landlord Isaías Group, preventing *Plan Tierras* from distributing the land seized to the poor and landless population. However, a more localized analysis of these dynamics in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* reveals that demobilization is not always the inescapable and fatal destiny of peasant organizations in the context of a pervasive patronage politics.

The existence of a peasant-women-led land mobilization testifies to the importance that land ownership still has for the rural population of Guayas province, region with outrageous levels of land inequality and poverty in both urban and rural settings. The case of the land struggle in *Las Mercedes* presented here reveals a process of mobilization that was initiated by landless peasant associations and led by peasant women, a resistance that has endured despite the multiple forms of demobilization, along with corruption and violence exercised by a state apparatus that is tied to the interests of the dominant agrarian class. Patronage politics has not only constrained the collective actions for land by peasant associations in *Tierra y Vida* in Guayas, but at the same time, it has enabled strong resistance that is challenging its foundations and attempting to construct alternative cultural politics from below. The power of the

agrarian elite in Guayas cannot be challenged unless there is political mobilization at national level that can force the national government to confront the local oligarchs and ensure the redistribution of land. For this resistance to transcend the local-regional level and contribute to a national social movement, it would be necessary to overcome the regional ethnic barriers that divide the geography of this small country. Only then would it become possible to reconstruct the ties of solidarity that would incorporate coastal *montubios* and campesinos, and the highland Indigenous peoples into a single national movement that could contribute to broader Latin American movements for rural social justice and food sovereignty.

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5 Chapter Five: General Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter summarizes the empirical findings of this dissertation related to three questions: 1/ What are the extractivist features of the current agrarian developmental project, and how is it redefining access to and control of land and other resources and a healthy environment in Guayas province? 2/ What are the fundamental gender-differentiated changes within peasant associations in *Hacienda La Indiana* and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* generated by their access to land through the public policy *Plan Tierras* and their involvement in the commodity chains of sugar cane and rice, respectively? and 3/ Is the Ecuadorian state generating conditions under which women's emancipation and autonomous peasant mobilization for land and food sovereignty can be reinforced to challenge the conflicting scenarios of the extractive agricultural model? The chapter also outlines some theoretical and practical contributions of my research and ends by identifying some avenues for future research and providing some concluding thoughts on my doctoral research.

5.2 Empirical findings

5.2.1 The agrarian extractivist project in Guayas: general features and implications

Following McKay, Alonso-Fradejas, and Ezquerro-Cañete (2021), a dimension that guides these general conclusions to my research findings is the territorial restructuring that is an integral part of the current extractivist project of agricultural development in Ecuador. Specifically, in my research I refer to the uneven and messy process used by successive governments of PAIS Alliance (2007-2021) to restructure existing institutions and social relations under the discourses of food sovereignty and productive matrix transformation in the coastal province of Guayas. This territorial dimension is important for small countries with little or no participation in the international market of flex crops, such as Ecuador, where the contemporary dynamics of agrarian extractivism are not always perceptible as such in comparison to the grand scale and the volume of that global phenomenon. Instead, these dynamics are found in the process of reorganizing a natural-resources-endowed area, Guayas province, undertaken by the state at the service of extractive capital. Indeed, the PAIS Alliance governments had a crucial role in

facilitating this process while they enjoyed the political power and opportunity to draw on abundant revenues from high oil prices, the country's principal export, that flowed into state coffers during 2005-2014. A territorial perspective allows us to understand the broader implications of this transformation for the peasant associations that were integrated into the new sugar cane-based agrofuel complex as well as in the more traditional cash crop complex of rice located on the same territory. In effect, my research demonstrates how peasant associations that acquired land under the distributive land policy, *Plan Tierras,* in the province of Guayas are afflicted by interlinked policies that are transforming this territory to adapt to the contemporary dynamic of extractivist agriculture.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the extractivist features of the sugar cane-based agro-fuel program, *Ecopaís,* that brought important transformations in Guayas. This program triggered the expansion of the agricultural frontier and the inclusion of new sugar cane producers without substantially altering the concentration of land, which remains mostly in the hands of the three large oligopolistic sugar cane mills. Today, the sugar cane mills —San Carlos, Valdéz and Coazúcar— appropriate not only the surplus value derived from the cultivated land but also from increased sugar cane-based ethanol production. This chapter presented a first approximation concerning the power of dominant agrarian elites to retain direct control over decision-making institutions, as well as current mechanisms that allow them to appropriate the surplus value of this extractivist development project. Indeed, the chapter analyzed the incentives provided by different PAIS Alliance governments, such as a favorable ethanol price policy and a public private partnership, through which the mills accessed state resources to expand the production capacities of their distilleries and exerted control over the production of biomass for ethanol. In addition, the chapter pointed to aspects of the paradox of promoting an associative model to allegedly foster a social and solidary economy among landless peasants under a distributive land policy that was linked to an extractivist agricultural development approach. In fact, peasant associations were subjected to the extractivist logic and rules laid down by domestic agrarian elites and their oligopolistic agri-businesses that control the coastal agricultural market.

The associative model was supposed to be a way of promoting collective work among association members and the pooling of revenues derived from their production of sugar cane and rice to pay the mortgage on the land that they bought through *Plan Tierras*. The documents I consulted and the interviews that I conducted provide evidence concerning the problematic

procedural aspects of this model in light of the socio-economic barriers that peasant associations commonly face. A set of new institutions were created for the regulation of this associative model, with the Supervisory Office of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (SEPS) being the most important among them. SEPS forced associations to change their registration from the Ministry of Agriculture to this new institution without providing sufficient and adequate information, and it imposed a new organizational structure on the associations that resembles the executive directorate of a corporation or a private business.[66] Furthermore, SEPS stipulated the submission of periodic reports and specific accounting procedures for the productive activities that the peasant association had to undertake. Thus, associations needed to respond to new requirements established by the SEPS, and to do so at their own expense, in addition to dealing with the bureaucratic procedures that had to be followed in order to benefit from *Plan Tierras.*

Moreover, the evidence provided in Chapters Two and Three point to clear contradictions between an associative model linked to an extractive agricultural model and its capacity to generate the conditions that might allow peasant associations to foster food sovereignty and retain possession of their plots of land in the long term. Table 5.1 summarizes the features of an associative-based land policy as it unfolded in *Hacienda La Indiana* and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* under the territorial structuring triggered by contemporary extractive dynamics in agriculture.

[66] During my research, association members expressed their discontent and distress in the shift to this new institution. SEPS officials, they argued, assumed that the appropriate technical skills and facilities to register at the SEPS were available to all peasant organizations. Furthermore, this new structure stipulates the hiring of an administrator who acts as both the Treasurer in the Board of Directors and the legal representative of the association although this person is not required to be an association member.

Table 5. 1 Extractive features of the agricultural model and implications for associations

Areas of inquiry	*Hacienda La Indiana*	*Hacienda Las Mercedes*
Organizational form	Members supervise the work of an administrator who hires paid workers for the production of sugar cane	Association members produce mainly rice individually
Agricultural market	Associations have a single contract with the sugar cane mill for the seasonal harvest of sugar cane	Members of the associations sell their products to the rice mills or intermediaries
	Sugar cane and rice prices fell systematically	
Technological inputs	Associations buy the technological kits, except the seeds, from the agro-industrial outlets. They could not afford to replant their fields with certified seeds supplied by the sugar cane mills	Members buy the technological kits from the agro-industrial outlets for every season. *Plan Semillas* has inserted members into relations of dependency with the agribusinesses, in some cases leading to indebtedness with the state financial institution
	Prices of technological kits increase steadily	
Labour	Only a few members undertake the maintenance activities (soil preparation, weed removal, cleaning of water canals, irrigation, application of fertilizers, fumigation), and the *desoje* (removal of dry leaves)	Members have more direct involvement in the maintenance activities. Depending on their economic status, they rent machines and hire neighbouring landless young men or other males who are members of the association to fumigate
Machinery and transportation	Sugar cane mills comes with their own workers and machinery to cut and harvest the production	Well-off members rent harvest machinery and hire transport while less wealthy depend on the intermediaries
	Dependency on external transport, equipment and machinery	
Impact on nature and health	Destruction of environmental conditions due to highly toxic chemicals is naturalized as the necessary cost for productivity and efficiency, while subsequent health problems are ignored or transferred to others.	

Source: Own authorship

The pathways taken by the various associations points to a series of contradictions. First, agrarian elites that control the markets appropriate the agricultural products at ever-lower prices, whether or not the associations organize their work collectively or individually. As Chapter Two illustrated, an associative model to produce sugar cane has been fully adopted by all but one

association in *Hacienda La Indiana.*[67] Compared to *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, sugar cane production is managed in *Hacienda La Indiana* under a single seasonal contract that allows all three peasant associations to cultivate cane and sell it to the neighbouring sugarcane mill, Coazúcar, collectively. Here it is worth noting that the work of members mainly consists of supervising the productive process managed by a hired administrator, who in turn hires a few association members and external workers to do the actual labour. Thus, relationships among association members, who for the most part do not live on this rural estate, and their land are determined by the economic arrangements set up in the seasonal contract between their associations and the sugar cane mill.[68] Chapter Three described a different organizational production form in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. Without direct and reliable market access, peasants in this rural estate are put into a situation in which they have to sell the rice to mills or to intermediaries and to do so individually. Chapters Two and Three provide evidence that access to markets is an important factor to foster an associative model. However, peasant associations in both research sites are placed into a vulnerable position since state policies - influenced by the agro-industrial elite - systematically lower the prices of agricultural products such as rice and sugar cane. This ultimately hinders peasants from obtaining sufficient revenues to pay the mortgage contracted with *Plan Tierras*, and even less so, to live in conditions that meet the needs for reproduction.

Second, the associative model linked to an agrarian extractivist approach is accompanied by the promotion of technological inputs that create relations of dependency and subordination between peasant associations and the agrarian elites. As shown in Chapter Three, the purchase of technological kits distributed by the six main agri-businesses under the state program, *Plan Semillas,* was aggressively promoted among the associations of *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, driven by a discourse of increasing productivity in the rice fields. Despite the apparent greater access to the market of technological kits, Chapter Three underlined the multiple issues that peasants face once they purchase the kits. Indeed, their testimonies tell us how the oligopolistic power of agri-business companies and their political penetration of state institutions allow them to determine

[67] Some association members (*Coop. La Indiana*) have moved out of sugar cane production and cultivate other crops individually.

[68] Although there were references to *mingas,* the physical absence of most of association members does not allow continuous participation in these collective unpaid work arrangements.

the terms of market exchange by increasing the prices of the kits. As Chapter Two demonstrates, peasant associations in *Hacienda La Indiana* face the same dependency situation with the oligopolistic sugar cane mills and agri-businesses. In this rural estate, sugar cane producers depend solely on certified seed varieties produced and sold by the three biggest sugar cane mills. Ultimately, increasing relations of dependency on technological inputs that have become progressively more expensive and whose import and distribution is controlled by agri-business has led in many cases to relations of subordination in the form of indebtedness, thus preventing some association members from continuing to produce sugar cane and rice.

Third, dependency on equipment and machinery among associations[69] makes visible and accentuates existing social differences within peasant associations and relations of coercion with third parties. Despite still demanding hard-physical labour, the production of sugar cane and rice depends upon the use of equipment and machinery that were not provided through *Plan Tierras*. While in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* peasants need to rent the required machinery individually from well-off persons inside or outside the estate, in *Hacienda La Indiana,* the administrator provides the equipment and machinery to those in charge of the maintenance work. In the latter estate, only the poorest members that are physically able and have the relevant working knowledge are hired to undertake the maintenance work and the removal of dry leaves before the harvest. In *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, although there is more association member involvement in the maintenance activities of rice production, those who can afford to do so hire neighbouring landless young men and other male association members to undertake activities such as fumigation that involve hard-physical labour and health hazards. In both rural estates, third parties carry out the harvesting. In the case of the *Hacienda La Indiana*, the sugar cane mill brings machinery and external workers to cut and transport the cane harvest. As for the *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, well-off members hire transport and rent machinery to harvest the rice and to bring it directly to the rice mills, whereas poor members depend on intermediaries who buy their rice directly from their fields, mostly at prices below the minimum official price. These practices elucidate the state's failure to generate the conditions to foster solidarity among association members and within the agricultural market under an extractivist logic.

[69] In fact, the government of PAIS Alliance provided some machinery to associations in the *Hacienda La Indiana*; however, it is not used due to a lack of spare parts.

A final aspect that needs to be added to the contradictions of an extractive agrarian model is the destruction of nature. As Chapters Two and Three demonstrate, the use of highly toxic chemicals in the production of rice and sugar cane is leading to evident loss of environmental balance with serious health issues. In both rural estates, association members recognize that the contamination of soil, water sources, and air is caused not only by applying what some call "poison" on their own fields but also by what drifts in from neighbouring mono-crop plantations. Association members report poisoning from the exposure of their bodies to toxic chemicals, with subsequent health issues such as cancer. In fact, a variety of different perceptions regarding the destruction of the environment exist. On the one hand, some members seem to accept this as a cost that they have to pay for their hoped-for efficiency and profits or the survival of their families. Although recognizing the effect on human health, testimonies evidence the immoral behaviour of some association members who are able to externalize this hazard to poorer people, mostly younger male workers. On the other hand, there are other members who question the environmental destruction and their own engagement in this extractivist agricultural development approach. As I will explain in the next section, the questioning results from the need to guarantee the essential daily conditions for family reproduction, and that is mostly in the hands of women.

In the next part, I will identify the differentiated experiences of women through their access to land and involvement in the extractivist production of sugar cane and rice.

5.2.2 Women's differentiated experiences in an extractivist agricultural model

Chapters Two and Three discussed the differentiated experiences of women who became involved in the extractivist agricultural model by becoming members of government-mandated associations in order to benefit from the state-sponsored land policy, *Plan Tierras*. To begin, my research substantiates that, depending on the organizational form, women undertake responsibilities in the production process, specifically in those tasks that still require manual work and the use of accessible technology.[70] Indeed, women's work in rice production in *Hacienda Las Mercedes,* where they individually manage their own plots of land, is more frequent than in the production of sugar cane in *Hacienda La Indiana,* where their associations hire an administrator who manages the cultivation of sugar cane fields. Furthermore, women can

[70] For instance, the removal of weeds with a machete, non-mechanical seeding, backpack fumigation, carrying water during fumigation (see Chapter Two and Chapter Three).

also be in charge of other tasks that involve decision-making and control over the production of this non-perennial crop. The organization of the season's logistics (e.g. the choice of agricultural inputs) or marketing of the harvest in the early coastal dry summer months are some examples. However, my research also revealed that the experiences of women depend on their status as members, live-in partners of members or external workers[71], as well as their economic status, age and physical condition, and agricultural knowledge. Testimonies provided during the interviews in both rural states show that the hard-physical labour that is demanded by the production of rice and sugar cane in the haciendas is performed by young women or elderly women who suffer greater impoverishment, and, in consequence, have lower levels of education and fewer labour opportunities elsewhere. Moreover, in both haciendas, testimonies refer to the outstanding physical strength of women engaged in the productive processes of these monocultures.

As a corollary, Chapters Two and Three examined the expected roles, performance, and perceptions of women engaged in a historically male-dominated production model, and the effects of their increased participation in the association. In both haciendas, some members refer to the productive activities of rice and sugar cane as an "inherently masculine work". Women who engage in those activities are considered to have masculine attributes when they equal or even exceed the physical strength of men. For instance, Kleber Bustamante, from the *Cooperativa La Indiana* states that women working in the sugar cane plantations are "*unas muchachonas*" referring to the strength of young female wage workers (interview with Kleber Bustamante, *Hacienda La Indiana*, April 2, 2019). Also, Lucía Miño, from the association *Fé del Campesino,* referred to the physical strength of her aunts: "if they get to work with a man, they would defeat them" (interview with Lucia Miño, *Hacienda Las Mercedes*, March 28, 2019). Here, it is important to highlight the contradictory sentiments of women in *Hacienda Las Mercedes*. While they proudly evoke their identity as *campesinas* and their previous knowledge and experience in agriculture, they also shared doubts about their long run capacity to continue the needed bodily exertion as they age. In *Hacienda La Indiana,* members usually tend to ignore the regular or occasional work of some female wage workers and of association members in physical productive activities. This proved to be different in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* where

[71] Although this research centred on association members, there were some references to live-in partners and female external workers that I could abstract from participatory observation activities and interviews.

women are more involved in the production process. Some male participants in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* recognize the work of life-in partners, not only in the production but also in reproduction processes as equivalent to the hard physical labour they themselves perform.

Notwithstanding these findings, I acknowledge the shortcomings of my research in providing more empirical data about possible changes in household power relations due to the reluctance of most of the women I interviewed to disclose information from their intimate spheres. In this respect, we still know very little about possible changes in the decision-making power within the households and the gendered ideologies within the coastal peasant society that result from the increased participation of women in productive domains hitherto assigned to men. Despite these limitations, my research sheds light on three more important interlinked findings that are significant for the feminist analysis I discuss in the next section.

First, my empirical findings hint at the excessive burdens on women as they take on multiple tasks in the production of mono-crops and the organizational matters of the associations at the same time while they continue to perform the reproductive work in their households. Indeed, the low revenues that association members receive from the production of sugar cane and rice, as well as the lack of adequate state social services, places pressure on the multiple work undertaken by women. Raquel Silva's testimony in Chapter Three is revealing; she states that women face a "differentiated suffering" (interview with Raquel Silva, Guayaquil, July 3, 2019) as they bear the burden of the work in their households, associations, and plots of land.

Second, and closely related to the latter finding, my research reveals the challenges that brought about the increased participation of women in associations that were organized under hierarchical structures by the state in a region with high levels of violence against women. The distributive land policy, *Plan Tierras,* did not envision any support to help women address gendered stereotypes that are embedded in the society and are often accompanied by high levels of violence. Alexandra's testimony in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* about violent confrontations with her husband suggests the continuity of domestic patterns of violence against women in the rural area of Guayas province. Also, female leaders in both haciendas reported on the chauvinistic attitudes of their male colleagues when they express critical opinions or perform their organizational tasks. The testimonies of women in both haciendas also demonstrate the different challenges that women face while assuming formal leadership roles in their associations since many of them have low educational levels, come from impoverished conditions, and did not have

any earlier experiences that could have prepared them for such roles. Indeed, just as in the production of mono-crops, women need to constantly demonstrate their capacities within the associations to be "at the same level" of their male counterparts. Furthermore, women taking over spaces of power into more gender equal associations formerly reserved for men signalled entrenched patriarchal perceptions about women role in the society. Contradictorily, in this case, the assignation of leadership roles to women do not always provoke resistance from their male counterparts. In fact, this research showed that some men opted to keep their distance from the front line of the violent and time-consuming struggle for land, thus not 'losing' the working day. These findings broaden our understandings about the conditions under which the experiences and struggles of women unfolds differently than men within a society penetrated by gendered perceptions about women's roles.

Third, my research demonstrates that the physical and emotional burden of women's reproductive work increases as the biological conditions of the rural estates become more and more contaminated with the intensive and indiscriminate use of highly toxic chemicals. In addition to the direct effects of physical proximity to the fumigated fields and the use of contaminated water sources for domestic tasks and human consumption, women reported emotional burnout and work burdens in the form of care-giving derived from the health problems of their live-in partners or male associates. Both Chapters Two and Three demonstrate the different perceptions regarding the destruction of the environment, however its implications in women's reproductive work are completely ignored within the political demands of the associations.

Finally, the empirical findings highlighted below help to further understand why an associative model under the distributive land policy, *Plan Tierras,* when linked to an agrarian extractivist project does not generate sufficient conditions neither for women's emancipation nor for autonomous peasant mobilization that can challenge this rural development approach.

5.2.3 State, women, and peasant mobilization for land and food sovereignty

Chapter Three analyzed the extent to which a more gender equal participation in associations, through the government-sponsored policy *Plan Tierras,* has helped to generate the conditions for women's emancipation for food sovereignty. In that Chapter, I demonstrated the significance and power of women's access to land. However, women's emancipatory potential for food

sovereignty has not resulted simply from their increased membership in peasant associations created through *Plan Tierras*. In fact, *Plan Tierras* did not include specific measures to address the relations of power in households, in associations, or in the extractivist model of production. Instead, as I have argued, the construction of power by women has resulted from the knowledge and capacities that they have been developing as individuals on plots of land and the supportive networks that they are collectively fostering with other women through the support of *Tierra y Vida*. Indeed, this is where the importance of accessing land for women and the reproduction of their families becomes clearer. Rocío González, from association *Fe del Campesino,* states: "people do not want to cultivate the land because they said 'we do not know if we will be evicted', but I tell them instead: 'it is because we are cultivating that they cannot throw us out'" (Interview with Rocío González, *Hacienda Las Mercedes,* March 29, 2019). Rocío's words are very telling of how the cultivation of food crops becomes the way of silently resisting the violent environment of a state that serves private elite interests and the oppressive conditions of an extractivist model of production they were facing. This statement becomes even more relevant in light of the recent efforts of former bank-owning landlord family, the Isaías Group, to recover the seized lands that peasants have been working and living on, as analysed in Chapter Four.

The conditions for autonomous peasant mobilization for land and food sovereignty are discussed in depth in Chapter Four with reference to the associations that are members of *Tierra y Vida*.[72] As I demonstrate, the successive governments of PAIS Alliance did not generate the conditions to strengthen autonomous peasant mobilization. On the contrary, PAIS Alliance managed to interfere in and undermine the internal organizational capacity of peasants through the creation of the associations that were required for benefitting from the state-sponsored land policy, *Plan Tierras*. My research reveals that, under historic politics of pervasive patronage, along with institutionalized corruption and violence, legally mandated cooperatives were ultimately used as mechanisms through which white-*mestizo* elite-penetrated governments were able to demobilize the struggle for seized land and to neutralize *Tierra y Vida's* radical position. This has had two important implications. First, it has prevented the full distribution of the seized

[72] These results are also relevant to understand the relation between the state and the associations of *Hacienda La Indiana,* whose umbrella organizations have been demobilized due to the relationship between their leaders and PAIS Alliance governments. As mentioned in the introduction, I was not able to participate in their advocacy work.

land for the poor and landless population, protecting the economic and political interests of the regional oligarchy. Second, it has partly silenced the autonomous and radical mobilization that would be needed to challenge the extractive agenda of the state that is being pursued in this coastal region. However, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, an enduring but criminalized resistance against the patronage-based and corrupt management of this policy continues to challenge the foundations of the region's high levels of land inequality and poverty.

Having responded to each of my three research questions based on empirical findings, I will now proceed to discuss the general theoretical contributions of this manuscript.

5.3 Contributions to the construction of a Feminist Political Ecology approach

As explained in the introduction of this thesis, Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) is a useful approach to analyse the gender differentiated experiences of globalized extractive dynamics at a local level. The FPE approach analyses the intersections of gender with nature and multiple forms of social difference, as well as the ways in which women engage in political action and agency to respond to environmental conflicts (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996; Rocheleau 2015). In this section, I discuss how my FPE approach draws on political economy feminists, ecofeminists, as well as feminist scholars, practitioners, and activists of food sovereignty and feminist de-colonial lenses to understand what I refer to as an oppressive incorporation of coastal women into a stated-led agrarian extractivist project. My FPE approach pays special attention to a crisis in social reproduction in relation to gendered roles and the environmental health of land (Hooks 2004; Mohanty 2008; Hawkins and Ojeda 2011; Ojeda 2021) under multiple interwoven systems of oppression inherent to the capitalist model (Lugones 2010; Curiel 2008; Curiel, Borzone, and Ponomareff 2016; McNally 2017). Adding this more comprehensive perspective to FPE allows us to better understand the various mechanisms of oppression behind interlinked policies and narratives that transform the territories to adapt to the contemporary global dynamic of extractivist agriculture. Furthermore, it points to two dimensions of the crisis of social reproduction, namely, it is the inevitable result of social-ecological contradictions of capitalist development, and it is the means through which different relations with the land can be built to resist the conditions of impoverishment and destruction of bodies and nature in the long run.

Throughout this manuscript, I have analysed how women organize their time and physical-emotional energy, together with associations, family members, friends, and/or neighbours to cultivate their newly acquired land under the particular context of agrarian capitalist dynamics. The gendered division of labour, a concept that captures the organization of work within a farming system by gender (Deere 1995), was transformed in the course of the specific historical moments of capitalist development in the Ecuadorian coast. In the late 1940s, the expanded production of agricultural export commodities disrupted existing relatively gender-equal farming systems and displaced women to the reproductive sphere, with increasing unpaid labour and greater dependency on men's incomes (Phillips 1987, 1989). After the exclusion of women from the agrarian reform process during the 1970s, this rigid division of labour was restructured in the 1980s to adjust to the labour conditions imposed in the new neoliberal phase. The withdrawal of the state from agricultural support programs and other social policies lead to massive migration from the countryside to the city of Guayaquil, where women joined the urban labour force to confront increasing levels of impoverishment among their displaced families. The redistributive land policy, *Plan Tierras*, implemented in 2009 was exceptional since it gave, for the first time, peri-urban and rural women the possibility of accessing land and gaining financial independence from their work in the production of cash crops. However, it centred on women's incorporation to close gender-equality gaps without addressing the multiple structures of oppression on which contemporary capitalist agricultural development relies.

As analyzed throughout the chapters dedicated to the research findings, women, like their male counterparts, are subjected to an oppressive incorporation that exerts physical and emotional pressure on their bodies to maintain a livelihood from the production of cash crops. The inclusion of coastal peasants, historically marginalized from rural development policies, into relatively gender equal associations was part of an extractivist project to increase the production and the "productivity" of agricultural commodities directed to national markets controlled by agrarian elites and their agri-businesses. This study demonstrates that the "dirtier secret" of capitalist accumulation (Fraser 2014, 61) under this agrarian extractivist project lies in the increasing appropriation of surplus value by agri-businesses supported by the state apparatus. Specifically, the appropriation of surplus results from state policies that lead to a step-by-step reduction of agricultural commodity prices for rice and sugar cane, and on increasing dependency on technological inputs (seeds, chemicals, fertilizers) and machines controlled by

powerful agri-businesses owned by agrarian elites. Like their male counterparts, women see themselves trapped into a coercive relation within the agricultural market that increases the time and energy they must spend to cultivate cash crops while decreasing the economic revenues that they receive from the exchange of their products as monetary compensation for their work. As a result, the inclusion of women's ownership of land and their work has simply served to increase surplus value appropriation by agri-business. This oppressive incorporation, however, unveiled additional hidden secrets related to a capitalist system in interaction with a system of hierarchal gender relations in agriculture that are important for a further analysis under a FPE lens.

The differentiated experiences of oppressive incorporation are visible when examining this capitalist agricultural development approach in relation to specific social-economic conditions as well as the gendered expectations about women's roles and performance. A feminist analysis shows how women's work in the production process varies according the availability of social networks, access to adequate technology, agricultural knowledge, age, and economic status. However, with decreasing possibilities of supporting families from agriculture, association members who can afford it opt to hire cheaper and poorer labour while they seek better paid work off their plots to sustain their households. Thus, oppressive incorporation has created sub-systems of oppression, where the capitalist system appropriates the physical strength and/or agricultural knowledge of impoverished bodies, that ultimately suffer the worst consequences of this extractivist development approach. Moreover, this research provides evidence of the continuity of hierarchical gendered roles historically assigned to women in agriculture. In the coastal region, cultural perceptions of the female-homemaker within the gendered family made women's work in agriculture invisible, excluding them from land ownership and rural development policies implemented from the 1970s onwards (Phillips 1987; Baquerizo 2014, 2020). This invisibilization was accompanied by an official narrative that equated the development of agricultural technology and increased productivity with notions of masculinity (Paulson and Portillo 2013). My dissertation research shows that this gendered idealization of agriculture put pressure on women to be as strong, effective, and productive as men while it invisibilizes women's inordinate workloads in productive and reproductive spheres.

At this point, it is important to bring into my discussion what feminist scholars refer to as the basis (Vogel 2014) or background conditions of possibility (Fraser 2016) for oppression: the invisibilized, disproportionate social reproductive work undertaken by women. Within the logic

of oppressive incorporation into the capitalist agricultural model, women undertake additional tasks in the production process, directly or indirectly, while they continue to sustain reproductive work in their households. In my research, I draw on Katz (2001) and Fraser (2016) who refer to social reproduction as the organized or unorganized continuous daily processes within households that supply relations of affection, solidarity, and cooperation to human beings who become labour power. The "social-reproductive contradictions" (Fraser 2016, 99) of capitalism in my research draws attention to the fact that the functioning of the agricultural capitalist-extractive project depends on the invisibilized and undervalued work of women in their households and, at the same time, threatens to destroy it through surplus value accumulation. Physical and emotional exhaustion, due to the multiple and increasing tasks assumed by women as cash crop producers, organization leaders, and homemakers, creates a crisis in social reproduction that remains hidden as a component of the intersection between oppressive capitalist and patriarchal systems. This dissertation highlights that women suffer differently from the lack of adequate livelihoods from agricultural production and social services from the state because of the inordinate pressures created by the reproductive work mainly borne by them. This oppression of women is not always grasped as such in a region where societal gendered norms about women's roles and increasing levels of violence remain domestic unspoken problems.

In this dissertation, I discussed the crisis of social reproduction under a FPE lens to emphasise the relations of gender and nature that define the conditions under which women accessed land under an agrarian extractivist project. In this regard, Naidu and Ossome rightly argue that the contradiction of capitalist accumulation relies in undermining not only women's labour but the "reproductive aspects of land" under the current capitalist model that threatens to dispossess women of their land and livelihoods (2016, 71). Following O'Connor (1996), Fraser (2014) and Mies (2014), my research evidences the link between the crisis of social reproduction and the devaluation of the environmental health of the land and the related emotional wellbeing of women that sustains social reproduction. Indeed, a more gender-equal land policy, accompanied by agrarian extractivist policies, relies on an anthropocentric system that disregards land as part of the broader natural ecosystem in which people live, create emotional bonds, and on which they depend for their survival. In these circumstances, the destruction of nature, if recognized, is naturalized as part of the sacrifice that has to be made to improve productivity and efficiency and foster agrarian extractivism. As the use of highly toxic chemicals, aggressively

promoted through states policies linked to agrarian elites, destroys the bodies and ecological means needed for productive and reproductive work, it increases the emotional exhaustion and physical burden of women in the form of the care-giving work assigned to them. Ultimately, the recognition of this anthropocentric system adds to a broader understanding of the social reproduction crisis as another constitutive part of the multiple oppression systems on which capital accumulation in agrarian extractivism is based.

While unmasking the inherent social-ecological contradictions of the capitalist system, the crisis of social reproduction is also a determinant factor that challenges the participation of women in an agrarian extractivist dynamic in the long run. Expanding the FPE focus on collective actions was useful to understand how daily grounded and oftentimes hidden individual actions are challenging the multiple oppressive systems in which women are immersed. For women who are responsible for essential daily living conditions, the quality of the environment determines the possibility of the social reproduction of their families. This outcome builds a different relationship between women and the environmental health of land as women become aware of the social, emotional, and ecological dimensions of land. As I have argued, forms of resistance to oppressive incorporation include - but are not limited to – care work in the form of food-crop cultivation as well as alternatives to commercialization and organic cash crop production. The importance of land for women's reproductive work relies in its emancipatory potential since it offers the possibility to construct power from the knowledge and capacities that they develop for themselves and their family members on their plots of land. Here, the concept of food sovereignty (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010; Robbins 2015) elucidates why it is not merely about including women into a land policy; rather it is about women gaining the power to construct local practices of food sovereignty that confront oppressive relations. Nonetheless, women's on-the-ground food sovereignty practices have not succeeded in being fully integrated within associations' demands nor within broader networks able to foster bonds of solidarity with other allied actors beyond the local and regional level.

The latter problematization has prompted me to look into even more hidden secrets of capitalist-extractive functioning in agriculture and provide further insights to expand my contribution to a FPE perspective. Here it is important to note that most Latin American studies that employ a FPE approach draw on feminist and Indigenous women's movements to analyse the accelerated advance of extractivist projects; mining and oil production most importantly.

These studies focus mainly on women's agency and mobilization against oppressive structures in which they have been historically immersed (Ulloa 2020). Despite the significance of these studies, they have not dealt extensively with the ways in which political action and alternatives to the status quo are demobilized nor with populations without Indigenous identity or adherence to feminist movements. As discussed in this dissertation, these are relevant aspects to understand the relation between the state and social movements under progressive governments in Latin America. In these last paragraphs, as additional aspects for inclusion in a FPE approach, I bring discriminatory, patronage-based narratives and policies together with ethnic constructions of colonial origin, a dimension of oppression that I have only marginally analysed in this manuscript. The understanding of colonial oppression that affects the coastal people who do not embrace ethnic categorizations such as *Montubio* or *Indigenous* is a complex endeavour that I hope to address in future work. For now, it is important to emphasize the ethnic-discriminatory character of the patronage-based *Plan Tierras,* inaugurated in 2009, that oppressively incorporated peasant *mestizo* women within an agrarian extractivist model while it left the political and economic power of the dominant white *mestizo* agrarian elite unaffected.

In the dissertation, I analyzed how oppressive relations continue today. Patronage relations that were inherited from the colonial period by the Ecuadorian state continue to be present in the way public policies are understood, conceived, and implemented today in the coastal region. When peasants, *montubios*, *mestizos,* and other ethnic groups adhere to state extractivist logics and serve as electoral-political support, they are celebrated and rewarded with economic and political favours. If they do not and they 'disobey' public policy impositions, they become subject to ethnic stigmatization[73] and punishment. This, in turn, represents another form of symbolic and material oppression that adds to the violent and corruptive structural characteristics of state-society relations in the coastal region discussed in this dissertation. All this has implications for women, especially for those who undertook leadership roles and occupied the front lines of a violent and time/energy-consuming struggle for land that challenged corrupt public officials who worked to defend the interests of powerful agro-industrial actors. The discriminatory patterns that undergird patronage-based agrarian policies erode the autonomous organization and radical mobilization of peasants, and most importantly, reinforce

[73] Some of the common pejorative adjectives that refer to coastal mestizos are "land traffickers", "lazy", "belligerent", "untrustworthy".

regional divisions based on ethnic stigmatization around the campesino *mestizo* of the coastal region versus Indigenous people of the highlands, putting social organizations and actors into confrontation. Ultimately, all of this continues to perpetuate the political and economic power concentrated by white-*mestizo* agrarian elites, the greatest beneficiaries of the expansion of the extractivist project in the coastal region.

To conclude, Table 8 provides a matrix of the interwoven systems of oppression related to the coastal capitalist model and describes the mechanisms that determine the differentiated social-economic and environmental implications on peasant women in Guayas and their possibilities to construct, maintain, and strengthen alternatives to the extractive agriculture model. My analytical contribution to FPE evidences the need to further identify the coercive, hierarchical, and discriminatory mechanisms within the complex and diverse systems of oppression that shape women's differentiated experiences, knowledges, and struggles when they enter into extractive-oriented modes of production labelled as gender-inclusive and progressive. At the same time, it shows the importance of identifying the fissures within these interwoven systems of oppression that shape the possibilities for the deconstruction of capitalist, patriarchal, colonial, anthropocentric relations to land and social reproduction, and for the construction of alternatives that place the sustainability of the human-nature life relation at the center. It also evidences the need to expand a decolonial FPE lens in conversation with contemporary social movements theories to have a broader understanding of the differentiated implications of agrarian extractivism in context of ethnical-identity diversity.

In the next section, I discuss some practical implications of my empirical findings and theoretical contributions.

Table 5. 2 Matrix of oppressive incorporation of women into a stated-led agrarian extractivist project

Interwoven oppression systems	Capitalist	Patriarchal	Anthropocentric	Colonial
Relational form	Agrarian elites and their agri-business over peasants	Men over women	Society over nature	white-*mestizo* agrarian elites over peasant mestizos
Mechanisms	Policies increasing the accumulation of surplus value through lower prices of agricultural products, and higher dependency on technological inputs and machineries	Narratives reinforcing cultural male-dominance over women	Policies and narratives focussing on productivity increase through indiscriminate use of toxic	Public policies and narratives using patronage relations: ethnic stigmatization and violence
General effects	Reduction of economic returns while increasing time and physical/emotional energy of peasants	Gendered roles and idealizations assigned to women and men in agriculture	Devaluation of ecological dimensions of land, and naturalization of environmental destruction and related health problems	Co-optation of peasant leaders and demobilization
	Appropriation of physical strength and/or agricultural knowledge of the most impoverished peasants			Regional/ethnic division between social organizations and other actors

Implications for women	Invisibilization of disproportionate women's workload
	Pressure on women to be strong, effective and productive as men
	Increase of women's productive and reproductive work
	Neglect of emotional and physical burden of care-giving provided by women
	Social reproduction crisis borne by women
	Women leaders at the front of violent and energy-consuming struggles

Source: own authorship

5.4 Practical contributions

The findings of my doctoral research are particularly relevant for the three umbrella organizations that represent the interests of peasant associations based in Guayas and that are affected by the development of agrarian extractivism. These peasant associations are FENACLE and FEI (in *Hacienda La Indiana)* and the *Unión Tierra y Vida* (in *Hacienda Las Mercedes)*. By identifying the new features of the current extractivist model and the on-the-ground gendered social, economic, and environmental impacts on people who are living on and from the land, my research might raise further awareness and commitment to use the analytical approach of agrarian extractivism and help peasant associations to find steps and paths out of this development model. Thus, the research is potentially important for umbrella organizations since it might provide examples of viable development pathways to construct networks supportive of food sovereignty that can be integrated into the short and long-term organizational programs and priorities of peasant associations in Guayas.

Umbrella organizations that belong to the regional and international platform CLOC/*La Vía Campesina* have extensive and significant experience and capacity to participate in processes to design rural development policies and laws in Ecuador and worldwide. By documenting the differentiated gender and environmental effects of rural development policies, my research might strengthen their advocacy work with decision makers and responsible institutions that are in charge of agrarian and rural policies and the implementation of Food Sovereignty policies in Ecuador and elsewhere. My research results might also be used in the advocacy work of various organizations within broader governance bodies that coordinate food and agriculture policies at different levels, such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

More importantly, my intention is to support women's own efforts to transform unequal structures of power within their households and associations, and in public policies and the society as a whole. As I have explained, rural women of the Ecuadorian coastal region have been largely ignored by anthropological and sociological rural studies and development agencies as well as by national and international scholars and rural development advocates. By bringing coastal women's differentiated experiences into the centre of the analysis, this research might

contribute to rethinking how their grounded and everyday practices of food sovereignty can be genuinely supported by the state, academia, and civil society organizations.

The juxtapositioning of agrarian extractivism impacts on peasants' livelihoods and nature and national and global efforts to find resilient and sustainable responses to climate change are another practical contribution of this research. The latter aspect is particularly important in light of the predatory extractive nature of the current food and agriculture systems and agro-fuel production, with undeniable contributions to the current climate crisis. It is my hope that my study has implications for broader policy formulation, thus benefiting decision makers and responsible institutions that are in charge of agrarian policies, climate change, and gender programs at different levels.

5.5 Avenues for future research

My FPE study of the gendered experiences within and the resistance against agrarian extractivism in Ecuador points to several important issues for further research. This includes drawing on data gathered during this research to continue examining the territorial restructuring process underway in Guayas and other provinces and regions, including other forms of agricultural and non-agricultural commodities. For instance, while I conducted my fieldwork and wrote this dissertation, the development of the shrimp industry is another important extractivist project that has been expanding aggressively on agricultural land in Guayas, threatening the peasant associations in *Hacienda Las Mercedes* that accessed land through *Plan Tierras*. Given the coercive conditions in which peasant associations live, exposed by my research, further inquiry is needed to understand how the current waves of displacement and evictions of rural people in the province relates to this extractivist trend and is leading to a process of land and resource grabbing. In this regard, more efforts to understand the relation between women-nature oppression, the participation of migrant women (especially from Venezuela as cheap labour) and the consolidation of the shrimp extractive production model need to be pursued. These critical issues about the specific reality of rural areas of Guayas have yet to be addressed in the academic literature.

There is also a need to better understand the importance of land for the social reproductive work of women and the diverse nature of peasant economies in the coastal region. In this regard, neither the official data nor scholars, mostly foreign or from the highland region,

have addressed coastal realities adequately. Thus, more research is needed to understand the diverse peasant agro-ecologies (Guerrero 2021) that may or may not be combined with monocultural production, most importantly practiced by women during the global pandemic, that contribute to the provision of food for local markets and the social reproduction of families and communities. Also, it is necessary to explore adequate research methods that can provide empirical data about patterns of intra-family violence against women and possible changes in household power relations. Finally, further analysis should be undertaken on the relation between gendered social differences and ethnic-social oppression mechanisms that affects the coastal mestizo campesinos.

5.6 Concluding thought

My status as an academic woman and a feminist activist who was born in the region of my research, and a person who has strong relationships to its peasant organizations, has been most useful for conducting the field-work in a careful fashion, with attention to detail. It is due to this privileged position that these chapters may contribute not only to theoretical-conceptual discussions but add up to a denunciation of the injustices faced by thousands of oppressed peasant families who live in the province of Guayas. For me, the possibility of being able to analyze the contradictions and ambiguities of narratives and actions that exist within the peasant organizations and associations, as well as within the public policies of a progressive government, form part of my responsibility as an activist researcher. I believe that only a constantly self-critical and reflective posture permits the comprehensive evaluation of errors committed by political actors in and strengthens social movements in the struggles that a new stage in the development of rural capitalism raises.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. 1 Participants Recruitment Scheme

Phase 1		
Research Question	**Selection Criteria**	**Research Participants**
What are the new features of the current agrarian extractivist process in the agriculture, and how is it redefining access to and control of land and other resources in Guayas province?	Direct or indirect participation in the state program to develop agro-fuel	3 leaders from the national peasant organizations: • *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Agroindustriales Campesinos e Indígenas Libres del Ecuador* - FENACLE (2) • *Confederación de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas Campesinas del Ecuador* - FEI (1) 3 officials from each of the responsible ministers: • *Ministerio de Industrias y Productividad* – MIPRO (Ministry of Industry and Productivity) • *Sub-secretario de Comercialización del Ministerio de Agricultura* (Sub-secretary for Commercialization of the Ministry of Agriculture) • *Ministerio de Medio Ambiente* (Ministry of Environment) 2 representatives from the private sector: • Sugar cane mill/distillery Valdez/CODANA • *Asociación de Biocombustibles del Ecuador* - APALE (Bio-fuel Association of Ecuador) 4 representatives from the small-scale producers and worker unions • *Unión Nacional de Cañicultores del Ecuador* – UNCE (National Union of sugar cane producers) (2) • Sugar cane mills union of Coazúcar, • *Unión de Trabajadores Alcoholeros del Ecuador* (Alcohol Workers Union). 3 sugar cane/agro-fuels experts based in Guayas • Agrarian scholar specialized in Guayas, • Agro-fuels expert, • Professor at *Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral* – ESPOL (Superior Polytechnic School of the Litoral) **Total: 15 semi-structured interviews in Phase 1**
Phase 2		
What are the fundamental gender-differentiated changes of peasant associations in *Hacienda La*	Membership (women and men) of the grassroots organizations based	16 association members in *Hacienda La Indiana:* • 2 FENACLE associations: *27 de Octubre* (3 men and 1 women) *and Buen Vivir* (3 men and 3 women*),* and • 1 FEI association: *Coop. La Indiana* (3 men and 3 women).

Indiana and *Hacienda Las Mercedes* generated by their access to land through the public policy *Plan Tierras* and their involvement in the commodity chains of sugar cane and rice, respectively?	in the *Hacienda Las Mercedes* and *Hacienda La Indiana*	29 association members in *Hacienda Las Mercedes:* • *Tierra y Vida* associations: *Victoria de Las Mercedes* (2 men and 4 women), *Patria Nueva* (3 men and 4 women), *Nueva Revolución* (3 men and 1 women), *Fe del Campesino* (1 man and 3 women), *Ganaderos Félix Mora León* (1 men and 2 women), and • Other associations*: Emmanuel* (1women), *Rafael Brito Mendoza* (1 man and 1 women), *Atara* (1 women), *Ex-Trabajadores de la Hacienda* (1 man). **Total: 45 semi-structured interviews in Phase 2**
Phase 3		
Is the Ecuadorian state generating conditions under which an women's emancipation and autonomous peasant mobilization for land and Food Sovereignty can be reinforced to challenge the conflicting scenarios of the extractive agricultural model?	Public officials and peasant' leaders involved in developing Food Sovereignty and related agrarian and land policies (special knowledge of Guayas province)	7 officials from each of the following state institutions: • *Secretaría Nacional del Agua* (National Water Secretary), • Decentralized autonomous government of Guayas, • *Conferencia Plurinacional e Intercultural de la Soberanía Alimentaria* - COPISA (Plurinational and Intercultural Conference of Food Sovereignty) (2), • *Plan Tierras (Ministry of Agriculture),* • *Sub-secretaría de Tierras y Reforma Agraria* - SSTRA (Sub-Secretariat of Land and Agrarian Reform), and • *Sub-secretaría de Agricultura Familiar Campesina* (National Sub-Secretary for Family Farmer Agriculture). 4 leaders of coastal peasant organizations: • *Movimiento Nacional Campesino* (FECAOL), • Peasant Organization Union of Quevedo (*UOCQ), and* • *Tierra y Vida* (2). **Total: 11 semi-structured interviews in Phase 3**

Appendix 1. 2 Recruitment script (Phase 1)

** This is the basis text that I used for written and/or oral participation request. I translated this text into Spanish once the ethics application approved it.

Hello, my name is Natalia Landívar. I am a Ph.D. candidate in Natural Resources and Environmental Management in the University of Manitoba, Canada. My research objective is to analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages for the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations in becoming involved or being excluded from investments in the sugar cane commodity chain. My research objective is also to identify the gender-differentiated effects of involvement or exclusion from sugar cane investments, and to understand whether the biomass rural development model meets the food sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations based in the area of study.

I am inviting you to participate because you are directly or indirectly participating in the state program to develop agrofuel. Your participation in this research will be voluntary, i.e. I will not provide monetary compensation for your participation in this study. Your participation includes an interview which will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to provide consent to multiple aspects of the research either in writing or on an audio recording. Consent is ongoing, and can also be withdrawn at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. Furthermore, you will decide whether you wish to use your real name or remain **unidentifiable**.

Please, let me know as soon as possible if you would like to participate in my research project. **You can send me an email to: landivan@myumanitoba.ca.** I can also be reached at 0967192475 for any question you have and if you decide to participate.

Appendix 1. 3 Recruitment agreement with associations (Phase 2)

** This is the basis text that I used for written agreement with association on the recruitment of their members. I translated this text into Spanish once the ethics application approved it.

I hereby acknowledge that Natalia Landívar has consulted with our organization XX about the usefulness of the doctoral research project titled The Sugar Cane Commodity Chain in Southwest Ecuador: A Food Sovereignty and Feminist Political Ecology Approach. The objective of this research project is to analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages for small-scale farmer and peasant organizations of becoming involved in or being excluded from investments in the sugar cane commodity chain. This field work will take place from December 2018/January 2019 to April 2019 in the Hacienda XX where Natalia Landívar will be conducting interviews and focus groups with the members of the grassroots organizations XX.

I hereby acknowledge that the national organization XX agrees to support the research of Natalia Landívar, whose results could be integrated into the short- and long-term priorities of our organization. Furthermore, the research findings can be used in the organization's advocacy work with national institutions responsible for rural development and food sovereignty and/or other broader governance bodies that coordinate food and agriculture policies at different levels. By making these research issues more visible in Ecuadorian society, the research can also be used to create space for linkages and collaborations among research and rural development partners that work on sustainable food systems and women's empowerment.

Our organization XX agrees to support Ph.D. candidate Natalia Landívar in recruiting in the most effective and gender inclusive way the members of our grassroots organizations who are the most suitable research participants. For that, we have invited Ms. Landívar to participate in a meeting with the association XX so that she can raise awareness about the research project and directly invite the members to participate. It is important to note that our organization will allow Ms. Landívar to apply corrective measures if over the course of her research she identifies other members who may have been excluded to participate in the recruitment process.

Best wishes

Appendix 1. 4 Recruitment script (Phase 3)

** This is the basis text that I used for written and/or oral participation request. I translated this text into Spanish once the ethics application approved it.

Hello, my name is Natalia Landívar. I am a Ph.D. candidate in Natural Resources and Environmental Management in the University of Manitoba, Canada. My research objective is to analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages for the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations in becoming involved or being excluded from investments in the sugar cane commodity chain. My research objective is also to identify the gender-differentiated effects of involvement or exclusion from sugar cane investments, and to understand whether the biomass rural development model meets the food sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations based in the area of study.

I am inviting you to participate because you are a public official/peasant' leader involved in developing Food Sovereignty. Your participation in this research will be voluntary, i.e. I will not provide monetary compensation for your participation in this study. Your participation includes an interview which will take approximately 1 hour.

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to provide consent to multiple aspects of the research either in writing or on an audio recording. Consent is ongoing, and can also be withdrawn at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. Furthermore, you will decide whether you wish to use your real name or remain **unidentifiable**.

Please, let me know as soon as possible if you would like to participate in my research project. I can also be reached at 0967192475 for any question you have and if you decide to participate.

Appendix 1. 5 Preliminary questions list for semi-structured interviews (Phase 1)

Leaders of umbrella organizations/peasant associations:

1. Can you describe your organization? What is the objective of the organization? When was your organization born? What are the general characteristics of the organization's members?
2. What is the relation of your organization to the agro-fuels state program?
3. Who are the main actors in the sugar cane chain for the production of agro-fuels? Which one of these are new to the industry?
4. Are there new stages of production in this sugar cane chain that differ from the past? What are the new characteristics for this new stage?
5. What are the new trends do you observe with the production of sugar cane for agrofuel? What are the main changes you observe?
6. What main production costs have you observed in relation to the production of agrofuels? Are they different compared to the past?
7. What do you think are the main advantages of the inclusive policy of agro-fuels? For example, to what extend does this new territorial approach include the participation of women?
8. What do you think are the main disadvantages for small-scale actors in the commodity chain? For example, what are the environmental effects caused by this new territorial approach?
9. Do you have anything else that you want to add?

Ministries of Industry and Productivity, Ministry of Agriculture

1. Can you describe to me what the agro-fuels program is? What is the role of your ministry in it?
2. What is the estimated investment needed to generate agro-fuels?
3. Who are the main actors in the sugar cane chain for the production of agro-fuels? Which one of these are new to the industry?
4. Are there new stages of production in this sugar cane chain that differ from the past? What are the new characteristics of this new stages?
5. What are other main products and by-products (other than agro-fuels) derived from the sugar cane commodity chain that are promoted by the state?
6. Considering small-scale actors (sugar cane producers, farmers and peasant, traditional alcohol producers), how are they included in the program? What do you think are the main advantages of this policy for them?
7. How does the agro-fuels program guarantee the inclusion of women among the small-scale actors?
8. What are the main disadvantages for these small-scale actors to be involved in the commodity chain?
9. Do you want to add something else?

Minister of Environment

1. Can you describe the bioeconomy policy developed by the state? What are its main objectives?
2. How does your institution understand the development of the agro-fuels within the bioeconomy?
3. How do you see the production of sugar cane-based ethanol in the development of the bioeconomy? Do you know other products or by-products that can be derived by the sugar cane biomass?

4. Related to the agriculture, what are the main advantages and disadvantages for small-scale actors in the development of agro-fuels?
5. Do you want to add something else?

Private sector

1. Can you describe your organization? What is the objective of the institution? When was your organization born? What are the general characteristics of the members?
2. What is the relation of your institution to the agro-fuel state program?
3. Who are the main actors in the sugar cane chain for the production of agro-fuels? Which one of these are new to the industry?
4. Are there new stages of production in this sugar cane chain that differ from the past? What are the new characteristics for this new stage?
5. Which new tendencies do you observe with the production of sugar cane for agrofuel? What are the main changes you observe?
6. What are the main production costs that you observe in relation to the production of agrofuels? Are they different compare to the past?
7. What do you think are the main advantages of this inclusive policy? For example, to what extend does this new territorial approach include the participation of women?
8. And what are the main disadvantages for small-scale actors in the commodity chain? For example, what are the environmental effects caused by this new territorial approach?
9. Do you want to add something else?

Experts:

1. Can you describe your organization? What is the objective of the institution? When was your organization born? What are the general characteristics of the members?
2. What is your opinion about the agro-fuel state program?
3. Who are the main actors in the sugar cane chain for the production of agro-fuels? Which one of these are new to the industry?
4. Are there new stages of production in this sugar cane chain that differ from the past? What are the new characteristics for this new stage?
5. Which new tendencies do you observe with the production of sugar cane for agrofuel? What are the main changes you observe?
6. What are the main production costs that you observe in relation to the production of agrofuels? Are they different compare to the past?
7. What do you think are the main advantages of this inclusive policy? For example, to what extend does this new territorial approach include the participation of women?
8. And what are the main disadvantages for small-scale actors in the commodity chain? For example, what are the environmental effects caused by this new territorial approach?
9. Do you want to add something else

Appendix 1. 6 Preliminary questions list for semi-structured interviews (Phase 2)

1. Can you introduce yourself?

2. How has your life changed since you got access to land in the Hacienda? How have you and your family and association benefited from access to land? Have problems emerged since you got access to land? ¿What kind?

3. What other productive inputs (for example, credits, water, chemical fertiliser, animals, pesticides) are important for the production of sugar cane/rice? Do you have access to them? If yes, how and by whom are they provided? If not, why? What does this mean for your capacity to maintain the control of your land?

4. Which tasks do you have to produce sugar cane and/or rice? Does everyone in your family work in sugar cane/rice production? Which tasks do they perform? Do you share communal tasks with members of the Association in the production of sugar cane/rice? If yes, which tasks? Which other kind of task (agricultural, domestic, etc.) do you have aside from the sugar cane/rice production?

5. Have you observed any impact on the environment as the result of working in the sugar cane production/rice? Does it have an effect on your health and your family health? Are you concerned about these impacts at all? If yes, how are you addressing these concerns?

6. Can you tell me about your engagement in the association? What are your role and tasks there? Were you able to rise your concerns (social, productive, and environmental) you have just mentioned in your association? If yes, how is your organization approaching these problems? If not, why not?

7. Do you think that this production model of sugar cane/rice can be maintained in the future? If yes, what is needed to maintain this production model in a way that does not harm your health and the nature? If not, do you think that other production alternatives are needed in the Hacienda? Which kind of productive alternatives and what is needed to implement them? What would be your role, the role of the association, the national/regional organization and public institutions in finding alternatives?

Appendix 1. 7 Focus group discussions (Phase 2)

** These are the basis themes around which the semi-structured interview questions will be developed. Participatory observation and individual interviews with peasants (carried out in phase 2) will inform the further development of these questions. An amendment with final guide for the semi-structured interview questions for the focus groups will be submitted.

- Organizational history around the access to the Hacienda
- Control of land and resources access
- Monoculture model of production and healthy environment
- Policy and demands to guarantee gender equality and healthy environment
- Food Sovereignty understandings and values within the Hacienda

Appendix 1. 8 Preliminary list of questions for public officials and peasant' leaders (Phase 3)

Below is a preliminary list questions to public officials and peasant' leaders. An amendment with final questionnaire will be submitted.

- What does Food Sovereignty mean to you and why it its important as a framework for agrarian and rural development model?
- How is Food Sovereignty being implementing by the State?
- How are social movements and their grassroots organizations participating in the construction of Food Sovereignty?
- How can they influence Food Sovereignty policies in concrete ways other than through the COPISA?
- What is the role of the women in the construction of Food Sovereignty? Which specific measures does the State implement to guarantee gender equality and Food Sovereignty?
- How does the State understand the links between Food Sovereignty, the development of sugar cane based agrofuel production? How do peasant' organizations understand the links between Food Sovereignty and the development of agrofuel production?

Appendix 1. 9 Informed Consent Form (Phase 1)

** This consent form will be translated into Spanish once the ethics application has been approved.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Natural Resources Institute
Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources
70 Dysart Road Winnipeg, MB
Canada, R3T 2N2
General Office 204-474-8373

Research project title: The Sugar Cane Commodity Chain in Southwest Ecuador: A Food Sovereignty and Feminist Political Ecology Approach
Researcher: Natalia Landívar García

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read and/or understand this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Research purpose and objectives: The present research is part of my Ph.D. studies in Natural Resources and Environmental Management in the University of Manitoba, Canada. My research objective is to analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages for the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations in becoming involved or being excluded from investments in the sugar cane commodity chain. My research objective is also to identify the gender-differentiated effects of the involvement or exclusion from sugar cane investments, and to understand whether the biomass rural development model meets the food sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations based in the area of study. This field work will take place from August 2018 to June 2019, and data analysis and thesis writing will continue until approximately July 2020. This form is designed to provide you information on the objectives, methods, possible risks and benefits, as well as the expected outcomes of this research.

Nature of participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, **you may withdraw from the study at anytime up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher**. If you withdraw from this research, your contributions to the research will be removed and destroyed. You also have the right to omit any question you choose. The purpose of this interview, designed to take approximately 30-45 minutes, is for me to have a comprehensive overview of the new features of today's flex crop commodification process through the development of agrofuel and other biomass-based products. This method involves interviewing actors like yourself who are directly or indirectly participating in the state agrofuel program. By direct participation, I mean those actors who are involved in the promotion, financing and production of sugar cane, agrofuel production, and other biomass-derived products and by-products. By indirect participation, I refer to those actors who are excluded by the expansion of investments for this rural development approach. You can choose whether your contributions will be recorded digitally, or in note form only. Please, feel free to stop me at any point during the interview if you have a question or need more information so that I can address your concern.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Locations of the interviews will guarantee confidentiality and will be determined with you prior to the interview. You will decide whether you wish to use your real name or **remain unidentifiable**. If you request confidentiality, your personal identity will be coded in this project and all personally identifiable-information will be removed from research products; only myself **and my advisors** will have access to the real names of unidentifiable participants. This personal information will remain confidential and access will be limited **to me and my advisory professors**.

Information including audio recordings, handwritten notes, and photographs will be stored and locked in a secure cabinet. Once the information is transcribed and digitalized they will be encrypted and stored on my personal password protected computer that only me and my advisory professors have access to. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis.

You will be asked to provide consent to the use of any information published in a written thesis, academic publications, reports, research related websites, arts based research and conference presentations. In the consent section of this document, you will be asked to provide your informed consent regarding: 1) whether you wish to participate in this research, 2) whether you consent to having your contribution published in research products, and 3) whether you wish to remain **unidentifiable** or be named in the research product. You may request any of your research contributions or any other non-confidential data at any point during the research. You may withdraw any information you have provided upon request up to the up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. In the case you withdraw any or all information, it will be deleted from audio recordings, erased from field notes, and/or deleted from computer files; any personal photographs will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits: This research is not expected to create physical or economic risks for you. Benefits associated participating in the project include supporting the aspirations of the small-scale farmers and peasant organizations included or excluded from the agrofuel rural development policy of the Ecuadorian State.

Feedback and publications: If requested, I can provide you with a copy of your interview transcript for you to review and make changes **once the transcript is made, i.e. up to one month of the interview** (as indicated in the consent section bellow). **I can send you the transcript for review by email, or alternatively, I can provide you the physical copy of the transcript at a location that guarantee your confidentiality.** All non-confidential project results and materials will be accessible to participants approximately four months after the research project finishes, i.e. January 2021.
You will be asked to provide your informed consent to the following potential uses of this research: a written thesis, academic publications, public reports, research related websites, and conference presentations. Raw data will remain **unidentifiable** and the identifiable information will be removed from transcripts, recordings and photographs, if you so desire. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis (August 2023).

Contact information:

Ph.D. Candidate	Research Advisors
Natalia Landívar García Graduate Student Researcher University of Manitoba, Canada Telephone: 096-719-2475 Email: landivan@myumanitoba.ca	Dr. Annette Desmarais Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty Department of Sociology University of Manitoba 302 Isbister Building Winnipeg, Canada R3T 2N2 Telephone: 001 204 474 6489 Email: Annette.desmarais@umanitoba.ca Dr. Iain Davidson Hunt Professor Natural Resources Institute 220 Sinnott Building 70 Dysart Road University of Manitoba Winnipeg, Canada R3T 2M6 Telephone: 001-204-474-8680 Email: Iain.davidson-hunt@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about the project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 01-204-474-7122, or email humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for you to keep for your records and reference.

Consent: You will be asked to provide informed consent to multiple aspects of this research either in writing or on an audio recording. Consent is ongoing, and can also be withdrawn at any time up to the point submission of my thesis and publication of my results (estimated in August 2020).

Yes	No	I have read or had read to me the details of this consent form and understand its content. My questions have been addressed.
Yes	No	I agree to participate in the research activities outlined above, and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up to the up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher.
Yes	No	I agree to have my interviews audio recorded.
Yes	No	I wish to have a copy of my interview transcript prepared and shared with me.
Yes	No	I agree to the inclusion of my contributions in an cabinet that will be securely stored and accessed by Natalia Landívar García **and advisory professors**.
Yes	No	I agree to the use of statements I make during interviews in research products.
Yes	No	I agree to be contacted for future research conducted by Natalia Landívar García.

Choose one:

	I wish to remain **unidentifiable** in all research products, including the data cabinet. (Code:)
	I wish to have my contributions attributable to me by name.

Your signature on this form (and/or audio recorded consent) indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and

professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant name:

_____

_____

Participant signature **Date**

_____

Researcher signature **Date**

For oral recorded consent, please state : "On this date, _____(state the present date), I, _____ (state your full name) have had read to me the details of this consent form. I (do/do not) understand its content. I (agree/do not agree) to participate in the research activities outlined above and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up to the up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. I (agree/do not agree) to have my interviews audio recorded. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions included in an cabinet that will be securely stored and accessed by Natalia Landívar **and her advisory professors**. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions used in research products. I (agree/do not agree) to be contacted for future research about seed systems by the researcher

Appendix 1. 10 Informed Consent Form for peasant associations (Phase 2)

** This consent form will be translated into Spanish once the ethics application has been approved.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Natural Resources Institute
Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources
70 Dysart Road Winnipeg, MB
Canada, R3T 2N2
General Office 204-474-8373

Research project title: The Sugar Cane Commodity Chain in Southwest Ecuador: A Food Sovereignty and Feminist Political Ecology Approach
Researcher: Natalia Landívar

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read and/or understand this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Research purpose and objectives: The present research is part of my Ph.D. studies in Natural Resources and Environmental Management in the University of Manitoba, Canada. My research objective is to analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages for the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations in becoming involved or being excluded from investments in the sugar cane commodity chain. My research objective is also to identify the gender-differentiated effects of involvement or exclusion from sugar cane investments, and to understand whether the biomass rural development model meets the food sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations based in the area of study. This field work will take place from October 2018 to June 2019, and data analysis and thesis writing will continue until approximately July 2020. This form is designed to provide you information on the objectives, methods, possible risks and benefits, as well as the expected outcomes of this research.

Nature of participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime up to the up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. If you withdraw from this research, your contributions to the research will be removed and destroyed. You also have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to be involved over a maximum period of 9 months.

Information gathering procedures: If you decide to join this research, I will ask you to participate in the following exercises, either in the field or in some other mutually agreed upon setting.

Observation: This method involves myself taking part in daily activities related to farming and organizational matters (e.**g. organizational assemblies and gatherings**). My hope is that participation in research activities will not take away from your time spent doing every day activities. This method will also allow you to provide ongoing

feedback to research findings throughout the research process. On average, these research activities will last one hour and will not exceed two hours in one session.

Interviews: During my field research, I will ask for your participation in one or more of the following research exercise. You can choose whether your contributions will be recorded digitally, or in field notes only. I will always inform you if I am collecting information that I plan to use in research, and you may choose to not participate in any activity at any time. To ensure you are fully aware of what information will be used, I will go over all data gathered from interviews with you to make sure I have understood everything correctly.

1. Semi-structured individual interviews: The aim of these interviews is to identify the gender-differentiated effects of the involvement or exclusion from sugar cane investments, and analyse women´s ability to address asymmetrical gender relationships within their organizations. I will ask some questions to prompt you to reflect on how women and men value their involvement in, or exclusion from, the sugar cane value chain, especially regarding the access and control over land and resources, and a healthy environment. These interviews will take no longer than 1 hour. **The location will guarantee your confidentiality and will agree with you prior to the interview**.
2. Focus Group discussion: You might be invited to participate in a focus group as part of the research process. These focus groups are designed to provide an opportunity for you to talk about what you think of gender-differentiated effects and gender relationships in a shared space with a group of 10-12 members of the organization. The focus group will take no more than 2 hours, and will be scheduled at a convenient time to allow for maximum participation. I will ask you to respect the confidentiality for the focus group participants

Privacy and Confidentiality: Locations of the interviews will guarantee confidentiality and will be determine with you prior to the interview. You will decide whether you wish to use your real name or **remain unidentifiable**. If you request confidentiality, your personal identity will be coded in this project and all personally identifiable-information will be removed from research products; only myself **and my advisors** will have access to the real names of unidentifiable participants. This personal information will remain confidential and access will be limited **to me and my advisory professors**.

Information including audio recordings, handwritten notes, and photographs will be stored and locked in a secure cabinet. Once the information is transcribed and digitalized they will be encrypted and stored on my personal password protected computer that only me and my advisory professors have access to. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis.

You will be asked to provide consent to the use of any information published in a written thesis, academic publications, reports, research related websites and conference presentations. In the consent section of this document, you will be asked to provide your informed consent regarding whether all or part of your contributions to this research can be used publically. You may withdraw any/all contributions you have made to the research upon request until the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any

explanation to the researcher. In the event that you withdraw from the research, your contribution will be deleted from audio recordings, erased from field notes, and/or deleted from computer files; any personal photographs will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits: This research is not expected to create major physical or economic risks for participants. To avoid unnecessary risks, this research take care of your privacy and confidentiality by giving you the option of remaining unidentifiable, as explained earlier. If there is some risk of emotional distress during the interviews because there are harmful memories that may have impacted you, I remind you of your right to pause/stop the conversation at any time, or to skip questions, or to withdraw from the study entirely. If you feel uncomfortable with any information I have asked for, you can always feel free to skip a question or withdraw from the activity.

Benefits associated with the project will be numerous. By documenting your views and visions about the differentiated gender and environmental effects of rural development policy, my research results will contribute to critical perspectives on Ecuador's large-scale investments in sugar cane production. The findings of my doctoral research can be integrated into your short and long-term organizational programs and priorities. More importantly, my intention is to complement women's own efforts to transform unequal structures of power within their households and grassroots organizations, in public policies and the society as a whole. My research findings can be used in your advocacy work within national institutions responsible for rural development and food sovereignty and other broader governance bodies that coordinate food and agriculture policies at different level. By making my research issues more visible in the Ecuadorian society, it can also be used to create space for linkages and collaborations with research and rural development partners that work on sustainable food systems and women's empowerment.

Compensation: I will not provide monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Feedback and publications: If requested, I can provide you with a copy of your interview transcript for you to review and make changes **once the transcript is made, i.e. up to one month of the interview** (as indicated in the consent section bellow). **I can send you the transcript for review by email, or alternatively, I can provide you the physical copy of the transcript at a location that guarantee your confidentiality.**

In addition, all non-confidential project results and materials will be accessible to participants approximately four months after the research project finishes i.e. January 2021. Print copies of your photographs and a print summary of the results of the research, will be prepared for you to keep once the research has been completed.

You will be asked to provide your informed consent to the following potential uses of this research: a written thesis, academic publications, public reports, research related websites, and conference presentations. Raw data of those who want not to be named will remain unidentifiable and all the identifiable information will be removed from transcripts, recordings and photographs. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis (August 2023).

Contact information:

Ph.D. Candidate	Research Advisors
Natalia Landívar García Graduate Student Researcher University of Manitoba, Canada Telephone: 096-719-2475 Email: landivan@myumanitoba.ca	Dr. Annette Desmarais Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty Department of Sociology University of Manitoba 302 Isbister Building Winnipeg, Canada R3T 2N2 Telephone: 001 204 474 6489 Email: Annette.desmarais@umanitoba.ca Dr. Iain Davidson Hunt Professor Natural Resources Institute 220 Sinnott Building 70 Dysart Road University of Manitoba Winnipeg, Canada R3T 2M6 Telephone: 001-204-474-8680 Email: Iain.davidson-hunt@umanitoba.ca

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about the project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for you to keep for your records and reference.

Consent: You will be asked to provide informed consent to multiple aspects of this research either in writing or on an audio recording. Consent is ongoing, and can also be withdrawn at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher.

Yes	No	I have read or had read to me the details of this consent form and understand its content. My questions have been addressed.
Yes	No	I agree to participate in the research activities outlined above, and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher
Yes	No	I agree to have my interviews audio recorded.
Yes	No	I wish to have a copy of my interview transcript prepared and shared with me.
Yes	No	I agree to the inclusion of my contributions in an cabinet that will be securely stored and can be accessed by Natalia Landívar **and advisory professors**.
Yes	No	I agree to the use of statements I make during interviews and group workshops in research products.
Yes	No	I agree to be contacted for future research on research related issues conducted by Natalia Landívar.

Choose one:

	I wish to remain unidentifiable in all research products, including the data cabinet. (Code: _____)
	I wish to have my contributions attributable to me by name.

Your signature on this form (and/or audio recorded consent) indicates that you have understood to your

satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant name:

_____

_____

Participant signature **Date**

_____

Researcher signature **Date**

For oral recorded consent, please state : "On this date, _____(state the present date), I, _____ (state your full name) have had read to me the details of this consent form. I (do/do not) understand its content. I (agree/do not agree) to participate in the research activities outlined above and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. I (agree/do not agree) to have my interviews audio recorded. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions included in an cabinet that will be securely stored and accessed by Natalia Landívar **and advisory professors**. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions used in research products. I (agree/do not agree) to be contacted for future research about seed systems by the researcher.

Appendix 1. 11 Informed Consent Form for public officials (Phase 3)

** This consent form will be translated into Spanish once the ethics application has been approved.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Natural Resources Institute
Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources
70 Dysart Road Winnipeg, MB
Canada, R3T 2N2
General Office 204-474-8373

Research project title: The Sugar Cane Commodity Chain in Southwest Ecuador: A Food Sovereignty and Feminist Political Ecology Approach
Researcher: Natalia Landívar

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read and/or understand this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Research purpose and objectives: The present research is part of my Ph.D. studies in Natural Resources and Environmental Management in the University of Manitoba, Canada. My research objective is to analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages for the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations in becoming involved or being excluded from investments in the sugar cane commodity chain. My research objective is also to identify the gender-differentiated effects of the involvement or exclusion from sugar cane investments, and to understand whether the biomass rural development model meets the food sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations based in the area of study. This field work will take place from October 2018 to June 2019, and data analysis and thesis writing will continue until approximately July 2020. This form is designed to provide you information on the objectives, methods, possible risks and benefits, as well as the expected outcomes of this research.

Nature of participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. If you withdraw from this research, your contributions to the research will be removed and destroyed. You also have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose. The purpose of this interview, designed to take approximately 1 hour, is for me to understand whether the biomass development model meets the Food Sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations base in the area of study. This method involves interviewing actors like yourself who public officials involved in developing Food Sovereignty. You can choose whether your contributions will be recorded digitally, or in note form only. Please, feel free to stop me at any point during the interview if you have a question or need more information so that I can address your concern.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Locations of the interviews will guarantee confidentiality and will be determine with you prior to the interview. You will decide whether you wish to use your real name or **remain unidentifiable**. If you request confidentiality, your personal identity will be coded in this project and all

personally identifiable-information will be removed from research products; only myself **and my advisors** will have access to the real names of unidentifiable participants. This personal information will remain confidential and access will be limited **to me and my advisory professors**.

Information including audio recordings, handwritten notes, and photographs will be stored and locked in a secure cabinet. Once the information is transcribed and digitalized they will be encrypted and stored on my personal password protected computer that only me and my advisory professors have access to. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis.

You will be asked to provide consent to the use of any information published in a written thesis, academic publications, reports, research related websites, and conference presentations. In the consent section of this document, you will be asked to provide your informed consent regarding: 1) whether you wish to participate in this research, 2) whether you consent to having your contribution published in research products, and 3) whether you wish to remain **unidentifiable** or be named in the research product. You may request any of your research contributions or any other non-confidential data at any point during the research. You may withdraw any information you have provided upon request up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. In the case you withdraw any or all information, it will be deleted from audio recordings, erased from field notes, and/or deleted from computer files; any personal photographs will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits: This research is not expected to create physical or economic risks for you. Benefits associated participating in the project include supporting the aspirations of the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations included or excluded from the agrofuel rural development policy of the Ecuadorian State.

Feedback and publications: If requested, I can provide you with a copy of your interview transcript for you to review and make changes **once the transcript is made, i.e. up to one month of the interview** (as indicated in the consent section bellow). **I can send you the transcript for review by email, or alternatively, I can provide you the physical copy of the transcript at a location that guarantee your confidentiality.**

All non-confidential project results and materials will be accessible to participants approximately four months after the research project finishes, i.e. January 2021

You will be asked to provide your informed consent to the following potential uses of this research: a written thesis, academic publications, public reports, research related websites, and conference presentations. Raw data will remain **unidentifiable** and the identifiable information will be removed from transcripts, recordings and photographs, if you so desire. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis (August 2023).

Contact information:

Ph.D. Candidate	Research Advisors

Natalia Landívar García Graduate Student Researcher University of Manitoba, Canada Telephone: 096-719-2475 Email: landivan@myumanitoba.ca	Dr. Annette Desmarais Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty Department of Sociology University of Manitoba 302 Isbister Building Winnipeg, Canada R3T 2N2 Telephone: 001 204 474 6489 Email: Annette.desmarais@umanitoba.ca Dr. Iain Davidson Hunt Professor Natural Resources Institute 220 Sinnott Building 70 Dysart Road University of Manitoba Winnipeg, Canada R3T 2M6 Telephone: 001-204-474-8680 Email: Iain.davidson-hunt@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about the project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 01-204-474-7122, or email humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for you to keep for your records and reference.

Consent: You will be asked to provide informed consent to multiple aspects of this research either in writing or on an audio recording. Consent is ongoing, and can also be withdrawn at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher.

Yes	No	I have read or had read to me the details of this consent form and understand its content. My questions have been addressed.
Yes	No	I agree to participate in the research activities outlined above, and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher.
Yes	No	I agree to have my interviews audio recorded
Yes	No	I wish to have a copy of my interview transcript prepared and shared with me.
Yes	No	I agree to the inclusion of my contributions in an cabinet that will be securely stored and accessed by Natalia Landívar García **and advisory professors**.
Yes	No	I agree to the use of statements I make during interviews in research products
Yes	No	I agree to be contacted for future research conducted by Natalia Landívar García

Choose one:

	I wish to remain **unidentifiable** in all research products, including the data cabinet. (Code:)
	I wish to have my contributions attributable to me by name.

Your signature on this form (and/or audio recorded consent) indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial

consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant name:

_____

_____

Participant signature **Date**

_____

Researcher signature **Date**

For oral recorded consent, please state : "On this date, _____(state the present date), I, _____ (state your full name) have had read to me the details of this consent form. I (do/do not) understand its content. I (agree/do not agree) to participate in the research activities outlined above and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. I (agree/do not agree) to have my interviews audio recorded. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions included in an cabinet that will be securely stored and accessed by Natalia Landívar **and her advisory professors**. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions used in research products. I (agree/do not agree) to be contacted for future research about seed systems by the researcher.

Appendix 1. 12 Informed Consent Form for peasant' leaders (Phase 3)

** This consent form will be translated into Spanish once the ethics application has been approved.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Natural Resources Institute
Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources
70 Dysart Road Winnipeg, MB
Canada, R3T 2N2
General Office 204-474-8373

Research project title: The Sugar Cane Commodity Chain in Southwest Ecuador: A Food Sovereignty and Feminist Political Ecology Approach
Researcher: Natalia Landívar

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read and/or understand this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Research purpose and objectives: The present research is part of my Ph.D. studies in Natural Resources and Environmental Management in the University of Manitoba, Canada. My research objective is to analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages for the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations in becoming involved or being excluded from investments in the sugar cane commodity chain. My research objective is also to identify the gender-differentiated effects of the involvement or exclusion from sugar cane investments, and to understand whether the biomass rural development model meets the food sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations based in the area of study. This field work will take place from October 2018 to June 2019, and data analysis and thesis writing will continue until approximately July 2020. This form is designed to provide you information on the objectives, methods, possible risks and benefits, as well as the expected outcomes of this research.

Nature of participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. If you withdraw from this research, your contributions to the research will be removed and destroyed. You also have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose. This information gathering procedure involves exercises with actors like yourself who are peasant' leaders involved in developing Food Sovereignty.

Information gathering procedures: If you decide to join this research, I will ask you to participate in the following exercises, either in the field or in some other mutually agreed upon setting.

Interviews: During my field research, I will ask for your participation in one or more of the following research exercise. You can choose whether your contributions will be recorded digitally, or in field notes only. I will always inform you if I am collecting information that I plan to use in research, and you may choose to not participate in any

activity at any time. To ensure you are fully aware of what information will be used, I will go over all data gathered from interviews with you to make sure I have understood everything correctly.

1. Semi-structured individual interviews: The aim of these interviews is to evaluate the extent to which Food Sovereignty goals of the peasant organizations based in the area of study are being met, or not, through the biomass development policy. These interviews will take no longer than 1 hour. Please, feel free to stop me at any point during the interview if you have a question or need more information so that I can address your concern. **The location will guarantee your confidentiality and will agree with you prior to the interview**.
2. Focus Group discussion: You will be invited to participate in a focus group as part of the research process. These focus groups are designed to provide an opportunity to shared your thoughts about Food Sovereignty and Biomass development policy with a group of 6 people of your organization. The focus group will take no more than 2 hours, and will be scheduled at a convenient time to allow for maximum participation. I will ask you to respect the confidentiality of the focus group participants.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Locations of the interviews will guarantee confidentiality and will be determine with you prior to the interview. You will decide whether you wish to use your real name or **remain unidentifiable**. If you request confidentiality, your personal identity will be coded in this project and all personally identifiable-information will be removed from research products; only myself **and my advisors** will have access to the real names of unidentifiable participants. This personal information will remain confidential and access will be limited **to me and my advisory professors**.

Information including audio recordings, handwritten notes, and photographs will be stored and locked in a secure cabinet. Once the information is transcribed and digitalized they will be encrypted and stored on my personal password protected computer that only me and my advisory professors have access to. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis.

You will be asked to provide consent to the use of any information published in a written thesis, academic publications, reports, research related websites, and conference presentations. In the consent section of this document, you will be asked to provide your informed consent regarding: 1) whether you wish to participate in this research, 2) whether you consent to having your contribution published in research products, and 3) whether you wish to remain **unidentifiable** or be named in the research product. You may request any of your research contributions or any other non-confidential data at any point during the research. You may withdraw any information you have provided upon request up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. In the case you withdraw any or all information, it will be deleted from audio recordings, erased from field notes, and/or deleted from computer files; any personal photographs will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits: This research is not expected to create physical or economic risks for you. Benefits associated participating in the project include supporting the

aspirations of the small-scale farmers and peasant' organizations included or excluded from the agrofuel rural development policy of the Ecuadorian State.

Feedback and publications: If requested, I can provide you with a copy of your interview transcript for you to review and make changes **once the transcript is made, i.e. up to one month of the interview** (as indicated in the consent section bellow). **I can send you the transcript for review by email, or alternatively, I can provide you the physical copy of the transcript at a location that guarantee your confidentiality.**
All non-confidential project results and materials will be accessible to participants approximately four months after the research project finishes, i.e. January 2021 Print copies of your interview transcripts will be prepared if requested (as indicated in the consent section bellow).

You will be asked to provide your informed consent to the following potential uses of this research: a written thesis, academic publications, public reports, research related websites, and conference presentations. Raw data will remain **unidentifiable** and the identifiable information will be removed from transcripts, recordings and photographs, if you so desire. All the information will be destroyed after all publications are completed, i.e. three years after submitting my thesis (August 2023).

Contact information:

Ph.D. Candidate	Research Advisors
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This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about the project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 01-204-474-7122, or email humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for you to keep for your records and reference.

Consent: You will be asked to provide informed consent to multiple aspects of this research either in writing or on an audio recording. Consent is ongoing, and can also be withdrawn at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher.

Yes	No	I have read or had read to me the details of this consent form and understand its content. My questions have been addressed.
Yes	No	I agree to participate in the research activities outlined above, and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher.
Yes	No	I agree to have my interviews audio recorded
Yes	No	I wish to have a copy of my interview transcript prepared and shared with me.
Yes	No	I agree to the inclusion of my contributions in an cabinet that will be securely stored and accessed by Natalia Landívar García **and advisory professors.**
Yes	No	I agree to the use of statements I make during interviews in research products
Yes	No	I agree to be contacted for future research conducted by Natalia Landívar García

Choose one:

	I wish to remain **unidentifiable** in all research products, including the data cabinet. (Code: _____)
	I wish to have my contributions attributable to me by name.

Your signature on this form (and/or audio recorded consent) indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant name:

_____

_____

Participant signature **Date**

_____

Researcher signature **Date**

For oral recorded consent, please state: "On this date, _____(state the present date), I, _____ (state your full name) have had read to me the details of this consent form. I (do/do not) understand its content. I (agree/do not agree) to participate in the research activities outlined above and understand that I can choose to withdraw from any activity at any time up to the start of data analysis, March 2019, without any explanation to the researcher. I (agree/do not agree) to have my interviews audio recorded. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions included in an cabinet that will be securely stored and accessed by Natalia Landívar **and her advisory professors**. I (agree/do not agree) to have my contributions used in research products. I (agree/do not agree) to be contacted for future research about seed systems by the researcher.

Appendix 1. 13 Confidentiality Agreement for Research Assistants

** This consent form will be translated into Spanish once the ethics application has been approved.

Research project title: The Sugar Cane Commodity Chain in Southwest Ecuador: A Food Sovereignty and Feminist Political Ecology Approach
Researcher: Natalia Landívar

Herewith, I understand that all the information provided during the focus group is confidential. Furthermore, I will not keep any copies of the information provided during the focus groups nor allow third parties to access them.

Research Assistant name:

_____

_____

Research Assistant signature **Date**

_____

Researcher signature **Date**