

LAND OF GOLD AND OPPORTUNITY:
BANANAS, GENDER, AND RURAL SOCIAL LIFE
ON THE SOUTHERN ECUADORIAN COAST

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This is a study of how land rights, banana contracts, and gendered ideologies and practices coalesce to shape rural livelihoods on Ecuador's southern coast. In 2012, over three hundred workers organized into five agricultural associations to apply for Plan Tierras and the redistribution of the military's banana and guadua bamboo plantations. In 2015, four of the associations successfully gained their provisional land title to continue with banana exports whereas the transfer of the guadua plantations remains at an impasse. I use a (feminist) political ecology framework and (political) ethnography to analyze land redistribution, contracts, and gendered disparities in Ecuador's banana industry – the world's leading banana exporter. My analysis is based on fourteen months of ethnography in 2018-2019, over 80 semi-structured interviews with members and workers of the five associations, and a photovoice project held with women banana workers. I make three inter-related arguments. First, the ability for associations to pay the state for the land is predicated on the banana contract. Without a contract, the associations are vulnerable and economically insecure. Unstable contracts or unreliable banana contracts contribute to flexible work contracts and labor precarity. Second, the gender quotas required for the association's membership increased women's access to land rights and enhanced women's leadership and decision-making power within the associations. However, women's ability to benefit from land is based on the gendered division of labor that places women in the packing plant and men in the field. Third, I argue bureaucratic processes hinder the effective redistribution of land. Waiting for the state and land rights turns into a grievance that encourages local organizations to join national-movement organizations and seek alternative channels to the state. Waiting is a temporal and spatial processes and a site of struggle for the recognition of land rights and a political opportunity for movement-building.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Karla A. Peña was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. Her parents are Ecuadorian with ties to the Galapagos Islands and Guayaquil. She earned a B.A. in Liberal Studies from California State University Northridge in 2009 and a M.S. in Natural Resources and Environment from the University of Michigan in 2013. In 2021, Karla relocated to Austin, Texas for a two-year postdoctoral research position in the Department of American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acorbanec	Association for the Commercialization and Exportation of the Banana	<i>Asociación De Comercialización y Exportación De Banano</i>
ATLM	Access to land for family producers and the massive legalization of territory in Ecuador	<i>Acceso a tierras de los productores familiares y legalización masiva en el territorio Ecuatoriano</i>
CLOC	Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations	<i>Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo</i>
CNC-EA	National Peasant Network - “Eloy Alfaro”	<i>Coordinadora Nacional Campesina – Eloy Alfaro</i>
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador	<i>Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador</i>
DINE	Department of Military Industries	<i>Dirección de Industrias del Ejército</i>
Ecuadorunari	Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality	<i>Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador</i>
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization	
FENOCIN	National Confederation of Campesinos, Indigenous, the Ecuadorian Africans Organizations	<i>Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras</i>
ISSFA	Institute for Social Security of the Armed Forces	<i>Instituto de Seguridad Social de las Fuerzas Armadas</i>
MAG	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	<i>Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería</i>
STRA	Subsecretary of Land and Agrarian Reform	<i>Subsecretaria de Tierras y Reforma Agraria</i>
UGEDEP	Unit for the Management and Implementation of Public Rights	<i>Unidad de Gestión y Ejecución de Derecho Público</i>
WBF	World Banana Forum	

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic will have a long-lasting effect on global food security, currently impacting more than thirty percent of the world population (FAO, 2021). The pandemic forced governments to restrict trade, ultimately exposing the vulnerabilities and persistent inequalities in the global food system. Ecuador is the world's leading exporter of bananas, an industry that remained operational during the health emergency (ECLAC, 2020), while food insecurity and unemployment increased nationwide (WFP, 2021). This dissertation is a study of how land rights, banana contracts, and gendered ideologies and practices coalesce to shape the agrarian landscape and rural livelihoods on Ecuador's southern coast. It takes place in the agricultural heartland of small and medium-sized banana producers, where I analyze the gendered impacts of Plan Tierras (Land Plan), a state-led land redistribution project that transferred banana plantations from the military to the plantation workers in 2015.

The banana is harvested, packaged, and shipped every day in Ecuador. A representative of a national banana exporter told me in an interview in 2018 that the banana industry employs directly and indirectly nearly 3 million people. The plantation workers -- who nurture the banana, haul banana bunches from the field to the packing plant; and cut, wash, and select the best bananas to package -- are at the center of this analysis. The Plan Tierras land redistribution project transferred the military's banana plantation to the workers under the condition they continue to produce bananas for export and pay back the state for the land within ten years. To accomplish this, the land beneficiaries must establish a banana contract for export at US \$6.00 a box of bananas. The banana contract, which is required between a producer and exporter and must be registered with the state's online registry, sets the conditions for production. It includes provisions that standardize the packaging of the bananas, establishes the minimum price for the box of bananas that will be paid to the producers, and sets the number of bananas that will be supplied weekly. Based on ethnographic methods and over 80 interviews conducted across five agricultural associations, I argue the banana contract shapes the land beneficiaries' ability to pay back the state for the land and effects work opportunities.

Unstable banana contracts or unreliable banana contracts can generate flexible work contracts and contributes to labor precarity and the marginalization of women who work in the packing of the banana.

In this introduction to the dissertation, I provide an overview of my conceptual frameworks, research questions, and context for the Plan Tierras project and the redistribution of the military's banana plantations to the former workers. I also discuss my positionality in the design and implementation of the research, my methodological approach, and data collection and analysis. Lastly, I give an overview of each chapter. The three chapters are inter-related journal-length articles that address a question related to the redistribution of land. That is, each article make's its own contribution to tell a bigger story about land, bananas, and rural social life on Ecuador's southern coast.

Conceptual Frameworks

This dissertation is situated within critical development and agrarian studies, social movement studies, and critical geography. I build on a rich body of work in critical development and agrarian studies that analyses the expansion of capitalism in agrarian societies and critiques the development projects and ideologies that shaped intervention policies in the Global South in the mid-twentieth century such as the Alliance for Progress and agrarian reforms of the mid-twentieth century (McMichael, 2009, Escobar, 2011, Edelman and Wolford, 2017). Like Ecuador's agrarian reforms of 1964 and 1973, the Plan Tierras land redistribution project is focused on redistributing state-owned land (formerly expropriated or transferred to the state) to social organizations, including rural agricultural association, trade unions, and cooperatives. President of Ecuador Rafael Correa (2006-2017) promoted the Plan Tierras land redistribution project as a short-term fix to a longstanding agrarian problem – later, the government would adopt a Food Sovereignty Law in 2009 and the Law on Land and Ancestral Territorial Rights in 2016. The world food crisis of 2007-2008 – which emerged from the intensification of energy and food demand – launched widespread protests and food riots that pushed governments to adopt food security measures (McMichael, 2009). Plan Tierras was part of Latin America's broader wave of food sovereignty policy and state-led land titling, land legalization, and land redistribution efforts (See McKay et al., 2014, Enriquez and Newman, 2016, Deere,

2017, Clark, 2017, Godek, 2021). Governments in the region also ushered in land grabs, foreign investments for large-scale and long-term land leases to produce flex crops – crops with multiple and flexible uses such as soya, sugarcane, and oil palm (Borras et al., 2012, McKay, 2018).

Land grab does not always require expulsion of peasants from their land and does not always result in dispossession (Borras et al., 2012). Rather, land grabbing involves a complex process in which people may be incorporated into corporate agri-businesses and value chains while excluded from the processes of capital accumulation (Hall et al., 2015). Mollet (2017) reminds us that in Latin America, “land grabbing is an old process routinely operationalized through the state and naturalized through development practices that are bound up in historical racial hierarchies.” Land redistribution is thus another state effort to formalize property rights and create the conditions under which state lands or the resources on those land may be commodified (Kelly and Peluso, 2015). In the case of Ecuador, land redistribution is predicated on the ability of land beneficiaries to pay the state for the land transfer. Based on ethnographic data and analysis of interviews, I argue the value of the land determines what the land beneficiaries can produce and is also the major reason why Association Rio Siete – one of the five associations I interviewed that produces the guadua bamboo - is still waiting for their land title. Here, the commodification of land and “the social value” determined by the state – limits the ability for beneficiaries to exert effective control over land and resources (Borras, 2007). Notwithstanding, I demonstrate that landowners, the former plantations workers, make the day-to-day decisions on the ground and exercise a degree of autonomy and authority over land, labor, and production that responds to the state’s land provisions, their own livelihood needs, and market demands.

I use a political ecology framework to analyze how beneficiaries navigate their new land rights and how members of the associations make decisions about land-use, production, and labor. Political ecology is a critical framework in geography that analyzes the political economy and ecological dynamics of development and how capitalist logics shape environmental outcomes (Peet and Watts, 2004). A political ecology approach situates the contract within the broader political economy of the banana trade. In the dissertation, I juxtaposition the contracting efforts in Ecuador with other banana-producing countries in Latin America to demonstrate how banana contracts shape the agrarian landscape and rural livelihoods. In centering the

contract as an analytical lens, I historicize contracting (Watts, 1994), examine the meanings producers and exporters ascribe to the contract, and detail the materiality of the contract. I also use an intersectional and postcolonial approach in political ecology (Mollet and Faria, 2013) to analyze the impact of the Plan Tierras gender quota which requires women make up thirty percent of the social organizations' s membership. A feminist political ecology framework uncovers the racial and gendered ideologies and practices that shape contemporary gendered disparities in Ecuador's banana industry. I argue the gendered labor dynamics on the plantation that places women in the packing plant shapes women's ability to benefit from land rights (Ribot and Peluso, 2003), that is – it limits women's ability to not only own land but also work on the land.

My analysis of land redistribution also examines the liminality of land policies or waiting for land policies to materialize (Chung, 2018). Waiting is a power dynamic wherein subordination and domination are created and re-created through innumerable acts of waiting and making others wait – it's a governing technique that ensures state welfare clients understand and embody they are patients of the state (Auyero, 2011). Time and waiting are inherently political in that class, gender, caste, and religion can shape how time is used, saved, and bypassed and affects social networks and opportunities to gain access to state representatives (Carswell et al., 2018). Waiting for land redistribution in Ecuador entails a back-and-forth of paperwork, meetings, phone calls, land appraisals, etc. - that take place in the central offices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in Quito and on the plantations. I use political ethnography to analyze waiting as it unfolds across time and space. Political ethnography is a methodological approach to studying social movements and contested politics in Latin America (Arias, 2009; Fu and Simmons, 2021). I argue that waiting for the state and land rights turns into a grievance that motivates local organizations to affiliate to national-movement organizations and seek alternative institutional channels to the state. Waiting is temporal and spatial processes that is a site of struggle for the recognition of land rights and a political opportunity for movement formation.

Research Questions

Plan Tierras emerged as a short-term project in 2010, and in 2014 it developed into a broader land titling and land legalization effort called *Access to land for family producers and the massive legalization of territory in Ecuador*

(ATLM). Many have evaluated Ecuador's Plan Tierras land redistribution program, noting problems in its implementation, such as the new landowners acquiring debt because they are unable to produce on the land and generate income to pay back the state for the land credit (Landivar Garcia et al. 2013). Jaramillo Carrillo's (2020) comparative analysis of land beneficiaries – comprised of agricultural associations, cooperatives, and trade unions – suggests that the state has failed to provide technical support that will ensure production and revenue. In the twelve social organizations surveyed, Jaramillo Carrillo (2020) found that some beneficiaries are unable to make any payments on the land, while others are behind on their payments largely due to their inability to secure market opportunities to sell their production – whether rice, pineapples, or mangos. I argue the banana contract determines whether land beneficiaries can pay back the state, and more broadly, banana contracts shape the agrarian landscape and rural livelihoods. This is evidenced in how unstable banana contracts, such as the inability for exporters to fulfill the contract and pay producers for the banana, can generate flexible work contracts and ultimately, contribute to labor precarity on Ecuador's southern coast.

I focus on the redistribution of the military's banana plantations to the former workers of the military-owned company Hdineagros. In 2012, the manager of the company Hdineagros told the workers about the Plan Tierras project and the redistribution of the military's agricultural lands. Over three hundred workers organized into five agricultural associations to apply for the redistribution of the military's banana and guadua bamboo plantations spread across the El Oro province. Four of the five associations successfully gained their provisional land title, and they produce and export bananas. Association Rio Siete, whose members currently live on the plantation Hacienda Rio Siete and produce the guadua bamboo, are still waiting for their land title. The five agricultural associations – Association "La Chaguana", "La Guayas", "La Sabana", "La Pagua", and "Rio Siete" – are a window onto understanding how land rights and banana contracts coalesce to shape land-use practices, flexible work contracts, and gender disparities within the banana industry and the broader coast.

During my fieldwork between 2018-2019, Association Rio Siete was still waiting for their provisional land title while their peers owned and produced bananas. In fact, the banana-producing associations hired several of the members of Associations Rio Siete to work on the banana plantations. I ask, why the long wait for the

land title? How do members of Association Rio Siete navigate waiting and the uncertainty of land? In Chapter One, I follow Javier Auyero's (2011) proposition to use ethnography to study the process of waiting for the state, and I apply this framework to the context of land redistribution. I use political ethnography to analyze relations among social movement actors, state institutions, and bureaucratic processes and examine the factors hinder effective land redistribution. Social movements in Ecuador are important political actors that institutionalized the concept of food sovereignty into the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution and influenced the writing and approval of the 2016 Land Law. Rural social movements are at the forefront of agrarian reforms, often shaping their implementation on the ground (Wolford, 2006; Borras, 2007, Deere and Royce, 2009). In Chapter One, I argue that competing values over Hacienda Rio Siete hinder the transfer of ownership to Association Rio Siete. In waiting for the state, Association Rio Siete joined the national movement organization *Coordinadora Nacional Campesina- Eloy Alfaro* (National Peasant Network – “Eloy Alfaro”) in hopes that their affiliation would shape their outcome. This chapter contributes to social movement studies and discusses the social-temporal and spatial politics of social mobilization that links local grievances to movement-building strategies.

My second question addresses the associations' new role as landowners. I ask, how does the banana contract mediate the relationship between producers and exporters? As new landowners, the associations must adhere to the banana contract and sell the banana to pay the state for the land. In Chapter Two, I use political ecology to analyze the contractual arrangement between two associations, La Chaguana and La Guayas, and the national family-owned exporter, GinaFruit. The two associations are in the province of El Oro, Ecuador's banana capital. Figure 1. shows the distribution of banana plantations along the southern coast. The production data is sourced from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock's (MAG) UniBanano registry that has made this information publicly available via ArcGis (UniBanano, 2019)

Finally, I ask, what are the impacts of the Plan Tierras gender quota? The Plan Tierras gender quota requires that women make up thirty percent of the association's membership. In Chapter Three I use a feminist political ecology framework and a photovoice project to examine the impacts of the gender quota. I use interviews and photographs from a “photovoice” project to argue that women can have access to land yet

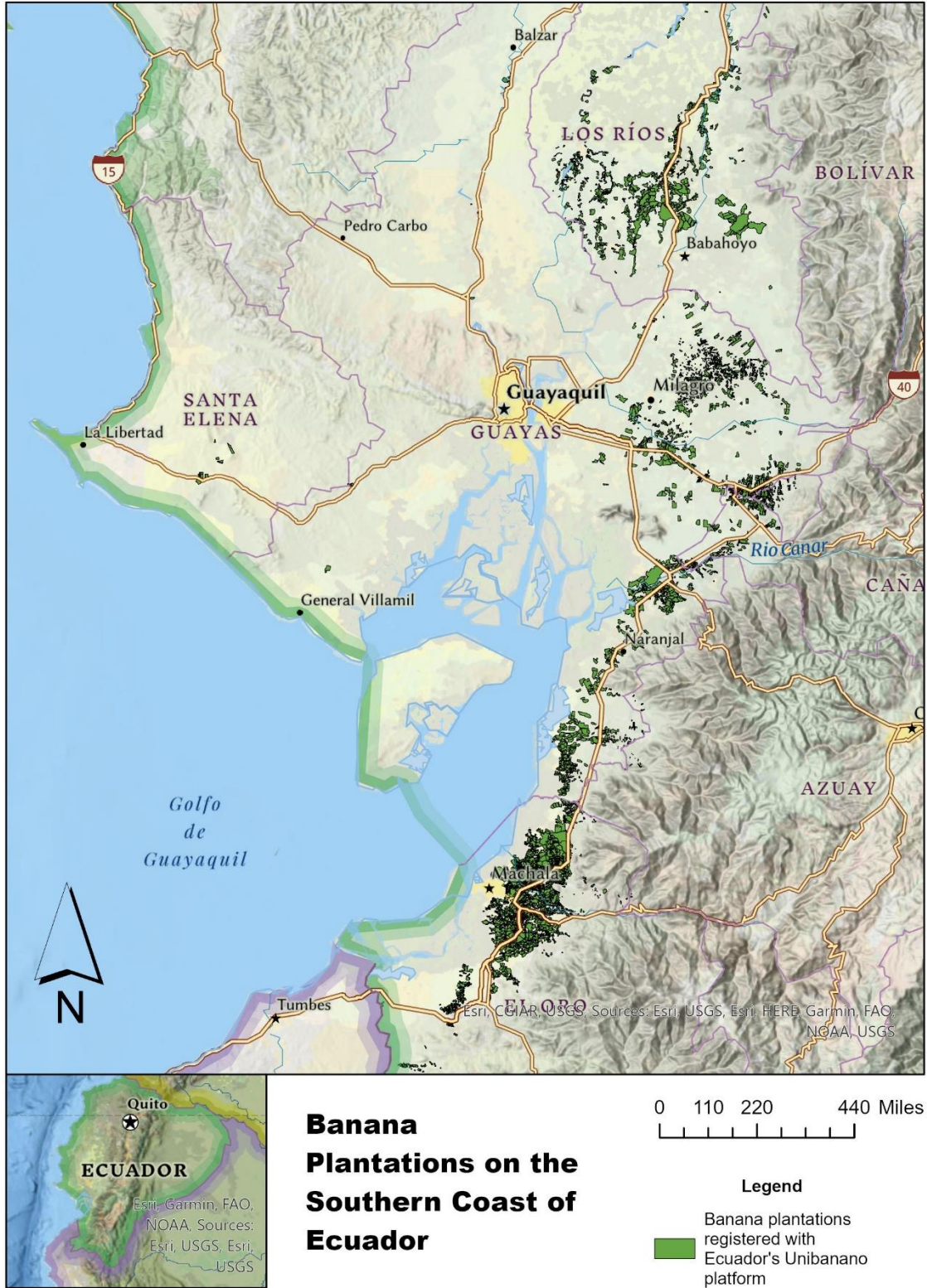
limited opportunities to work on the land. Women banana workers experiences labor precarity differently than men and often work on multiple plantations, shrimp farms, or sell food on the weekend to generate income.

Background

In May 2019, I met with Dr. Ramon Espinel, former minister of Minister of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) (2009-2011) and professor at the public university, Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral in Guayaquil. He told me the project was initially named *Plan Haciendas* but later changed to Plan Tierras because historically the *hacienda* embodied the oppressive and exploitive relations of production for the *campesino* (*peasant*). Rather, the change to Plan Tierras emphasized the transfer of land to *campesinos*. On July 15, 2009, President Rafael Correa designated Dr. Ramon Espinel the minister of MAG, replacing Walter Poveda, the sixth change in Correa’s cabinet since June of the prior year. Dr. Espinel, formerly vice-minister of Exterior Commerce, has advanced degrees in agricultural economics and knew former President Rafael Correa as a university student in Guayaquil. After two years of work in the 4-year term, Dr. Espinel left in 2011, disillusioned with how the government backtracked in its progressive ideas. In an interview, he told me “*No hay voluntad política*” – “there is no political will.” At the time, transferring land from the Central Bank to Plan Tierras unearthed absentee landowners and legal complications. Unlike the case of the military’s banana plantations, absentee landowners – legitimate or not – complicate the process of redistribution as the state verifies their land claims. The lack of political will refers to the limited funding and land attributed to the Plan Tierras initiative that ultimately limits the scope of the program.

Ownership of farmland is unequal in Ecuador. Crops harvested throughout the year for export such as bananas, African palm, sugar cane, and non-traditional fruits are concentrated among a few producers (4%) that control 23% of arable land with an average unit of production of 360 hectares. In contrast, 58% of units of production under 10 hectares of land use only 13% of arable land with an average unit of production of 1.7 hectares (Montenegro Siguencia et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Map of Banana Plantations located along the Southern Coast of Ecuador



Plan Tierras was a state-led initiative that was part of Rafael Correa’s campaign for an “agrarian revolution.” Plan Tierras faced several limitations, changes, and criticisms from the beginning. Early on, social movements pushed for a nation-wide land policy (*Ley de Tierras y Territorios Ancestrales*) (Law of Ancestral Territories and Lands) that broadens the scope of the project. In 2009, the Plan Hacienda project first aimed to redistribute 35 estates that were the patrimony of MAG and other institutions, where nearly 10,370 hectares were set to benefit 2,161 families in the span of five years, with an approximate initial cost of under fifty-thousand dollars (Rosero, 2011). The project later further developed under Espinel and a technical team headed by Michel Laforge. The Plan Haciendas was quickly replaced with Plan Tierras with a slightly larger budget and goal of redistributing state lands, and of increasing access to land by creating a land fund, and expanding land titling efforts and legalization of indigenous territories and *comunas*. In 2014, the Plan Tierras project was replaced and expanded to the *Acceso a tierras de los productores familiares y legalización masiva en el territorio Ecuatoriano – ATLM*), the Access to Land project. The ATLM is concerned with three inter-related areas: 1) nation-wide land titling; 2) promoting the equitable ownership of land to campesinos and rural associations through the redistribution of land; and 3) incentivizing sustainable agricultural production. The ATLM had a budget of over one million dollars for the implementation of these different initiatives.

My research is focused on the Plan Tierras initiative implemented between 2010-2014 and the redistribution of state lands – that is, estates that were transferred from various state institutions for redistribution to rural associations, cooperatives, and trade unions. Between 2010-2018, 23,161 hectares of land were redistributed to 85 social organizations (MAG, 2018). Most beneficiaries are located on the coast (Table 1).

The redistribution of state lands was specifically geared towards member-based social organizations including agricultural associations, cooperatives, and trade unions. To apply to the program, the members of the social organization must provide evidence of living or working on the land in question for a minimum of five years. Thirty percent of the membership of the social organization must be women. The land is transferred at a price that reflects a “social value” or a price lower than the market value. The beneficiaries agree to pay the state back for the land within a ten-year period, while also agreeing to follow a Land

Management Plan that provides a roadmap for producing on the land and generating revenue. The plan is mostly designed from the central offices in Quito with little input from the beneficiaries. The plan considers the social-economic and environmental conditions of the land that shape agricultural productivity and aims to encourage associative production based on historical and local context. In practice, this is not so.

Table 1. The number of organizations beneficiaries per province and total number of hectares of land redistributed under Plan Tierras between 2010-2018

Province	Number of organization beneficiaries	Land Redistributed (ha)
Cañar/Guayas	2	168.41
Carchi	3	270.13
Chimborazo	6	619.27
Cotopaxi	1	24.80
El Oro	8	2,743.36
Esmeraldas	13	3,122.36
Guayas	23	6,006.37
Imbabura	2	89.00
Los Ríos	11	4,820.70
Manabí	7	3,070.27
Pichincha	7	1,608.99
Santo Domingo	1	42.30
Zamora Chinchipe	1	575.18
Total	85	23,161.14

The minimum number of hectares redistributed to an organization was 8 hectares (ha) and the maximum was 1,647 ha. Most estates were redistributed in 2012, with 32 estates transferred to organizations that year. The number of members per organization ranged from 11 to 441 members. A total of 5,335 individuals benefitted from the program: 1,982 (37%) women and 3,353 men (63%) (MAG, 2018). Only 37 of the 85 organizations met the gender quota set to increase women's access to land, which required that women make up 30% of the organization's membership.

Table 2. Contribution of land for redistribution in Plan Tierras between 2010-2018

Prior ownership	Number of Organizations Beneficiaries	Land Redistributed (Ha)
Central Bank	8	652.17
Expropriation	15	6,441.79
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	14	2,544.64
Ministry of National Defense	14	3,379.68
Private	9	1,625.29
Unidad de Gestión y Ejecución de Derecho Público (UGEDEP)	25	8,517.56
Total	85	23,161.14

Former president of Ecuador Rafael Correa (2006-2017) issued Presidential Decree 435 on July 26, 2010 and established the platform for state institutions to transfer their underutilized land holdings to INMOBILIAR, the *Servicio de Gestión Inmobiliaria del Sector Público* (Public Sector Property Management Service). Several institutions contributed land to Plan Tierras, including the Ministry of National Defense (Table 2). On July 26, 2013, Rafael Correa publicly criticized the military for being the largest landowner of the country (El Telegrafo, 2013). The military's ownership of land on the southern coast is partly due to the military's control of the border with Peru and land used for military exercises. The military also gained land ownership over time in situations when there was no one to inherit land from the landowner. This was likely the case of the banana plantations – land transferred to the military from a private landowner. However, this history is partial as I explain later.

Rafael Correa referenced the 2008 Constitution to argue for the regulation of the military's involvement in economic development. The updated 2007 Law for National Defense had institutionalized the powers of the military in national economic development, but it was then limited by the new 2008 Constitution prohibiting the military from participating in economic activities unrelated to national defense (Article 162). This also meant the military was required to transfer land to the state that did not serve military purposes. Under the Presidential Decree 435, between 2012-2013, the military transferred 20,564.32 hectares of land for redistribution, including 14,589.66 hectares to the Ministry of the Environment and ecological projects, 5,876.32 hectares for Plan Tierras, and 98.34 ha for local governments and other state institutions (El

Telegrafo, 2013). The banana plantations on the southern coast are part of the patrimony transferred from the Ministry of National Defense to MAG.

The Military's bananas

The end of military rule in 1979 in Ecuador and elsewhere were followed by a decade of economic reforms and international aid used to strengthen democracy. The military continued to play a role in economic development into the early 2000s. In Article 2 of the *1990 Ley Organica de las Fuerzas Armadas (Law on Armed Forces)*, the military is responsible for conserving national sovereignty, defending the integrity and independence of the state, upholding the legal system, collaborating in the social and economic development of the country, using material and human resources in activities and areas that are strategic to the nation, and intervening in national security. A key institution created during this time in support of the financial autonomy of the military was the *Instituto de Seguridad Social de las Fuerzas Armadas* (Institute for Social Security of the Armed Forces – ISSFA), providing social security benefits to military personnel and dependents, including services such as loans and credits, health insurance, and professional development. The 1996 and 1998 Constitution further indoctrinated the military's role in economic development.

In 1973, the Dirección de Industrias del Ejercito (Department for Military Industries - DINE) was founded to manage investment opportunities, to harness public-private partnerships, and to institutionalize the military's role in economic development. In 2000, DINE created HoldingDine, S.A. Corporación Industrial y Comercial (Industrial and Commercial Corporation), a company that managed the assets and investments of the institution. HoldingDine had about 20 subsidiaries in all types of industries, such as Explocen (chemical production), Fabri-fame (shoes and other materials for the military), and Hdineagros (banana and guadua bamboo production). Hdineagros was formed in 2007 to take over its predecessor Dineagros (2001-2010) and to continue with banana production on the southern coast. HoldingDine owned 90% of the assets of Hdineagros and the remaining 10% was owned by Dinmob, S.A – another subsidiary of HoldingDine. With the mounting debt resulting from mismanagement of funds, the *Superintendencia de Companias, Valores y Seguros* (Superintendent of Companies, Securities, and Insurance) ordered the liquidation of Dineagros, which started in 2007/2008. Hugo Cabezas, the former manager of Hdineagros, told me in an

interview that to start fresh and without problems, “[The investors] added the “H” before the Dineagros and formed Hdineagros.” Dineagros and Hdineagros had the same social objective: to contribute to national economic development through the direct involvement in the exploitation of natural resources and manufacturing.

“The social objective of the company is to exploit in all orders, directly or through administration, agricultural activities, aquatic industries, wood and forestry, and participate in the internal and external commercialization of these natural products, semi-processed and industrialized, in different phases and in its derivatives, and facilitate in the mediation, authority, representation, distribution, commercialization, and other applicable civil commerce. To achieve the social objective, the company will execute all types of contracts, including the importation of goods needed for the efficient completion of the company goals.” (Contraloria General del Estado, 2012)

Hdineagros generated revenue from the sale of bananas. Hdineagros took over Dineagros’ production and continued to lease land from its parent company, HoldingDine. A 2012 audit of Hdineagros found an additional payment of \$220,000.00 to HoldingDine unjustified for consultation services and training for the management of the haciendas. Hdineagros had adopted the strategy plan of Dineagros without adequately assessing the company’s weaknesses in production and long-term planning. In other words, the report alludes to the fact that no changes were made to the company to require the consultation services or training. As Cabezas suggests earlier, the company merely created a new company and changed its name by adding the “H” to Dineagros (see Figure 2 and Figure 3 for banana labels).

In the leasing contract - *Convenio de Derecho de Uso de Predios Agrícolas* - the company agreed to pay US \$280,000.00 to use the land for banana and guadua bamboo production. The audit found Hdineagros increased overall production and revenue from the prior year under the management of Dineagros. In 2008, sales grew to US \$1,056,506.00 USD, representing a 57% increase from the prior year. The number of banana boxes increased to 85,597 and was sold at an average of US \$5.55 and low of US \$4.70. However, the year also experienced an increase in operational costs of US \$1,047,243.00. This increase was due to higher costs of expenditures in the transition from Dineagros to Hdineagros including the increase of cost of the lease of the land, new infrastructure, increase in fertilization costs, the consulting contract with HoldingDine, and

exporting directly to Miami and Algeria. The audit concluded that Hdineagros has low profitability and rentability because of the high costs in HoldingDine’s leasing of the land and the consultation charges.

I am unable to gauge how Hdineagros fares within the landscape of small- and medium-sized producers. In other words, I am not sure how important as producers they were versus others in the region. From my interviews and the comptroller reports, I know Hdineagros was well known in the area and paid their debts with local suppliers. They were able to fill a shipment with up to 150,000 - 160,000 boxes – though La Chaguana can produce this amount today. They sold their banana to Hormiegita, Trinifresh, and Bonanza. They sold between 9,500 to 14,000 boxes a week during the high season (Contraloría General del Estado. 2012). They first employed military personnel on the plantations, and that changed to hiring solely civilians on the plantation in the early 2000s.

Figure 2. Dineagros banana label brand "Valentina" circa 2003-2006.

Source: Banana Label Catalog



Figure 3. Hdineagros banana label circa 2007

Source: Banana Label Catalog



In 2010, all assets of HoldingDine – including the banana and guadua plantations they owned and the subsidiary companies that managed the plantations (Hdineagros) - were transferred to ISSFA for liquidation. This was during the same year Plan Tierras is designed and executed. Plan Tierras initially focused on privately owned agricultural estates under state control that were expropriated or that underwent bankruptcy during the economic crisis of the later 1990s and early 2000s. The project later expanded to include land from other state institutions, including the military. On August 2, 2012, the Ministry of National Defense transferred their land used for agriculture to MAG for redistribution. The inter-institutional agreement 749 signed in late 2012 for the transfer of Hacienda La Guayas to Association La Guayas notes that MAG is responsible for the paperwork and transfer of the property, including calculating the value of the hacienda, all fixed infrastructure and machinery, and agricultural production. Hdineagros, as the administrator of the

plantations, agreed to transfer Hacienda Juana Fernando to MAG in 2014, though the company remained on site for another year. On July 22, 2015, the Minister of MAG Javier Ponce wrote a letter to the Ministry of National Defense stating the associations are the rightful owners of the land, and as such, Hdineagros should “immediately leave the hacienda.” The company finally left, and the association took ownership and continued with their own production the day after. In 2015, the four associations worked the banana plantations as the new landowners with their provisional land title in hand. Meanwhile, Association Rio Siete land title is at an impasse.

Positionality and Research Design

Each chapter addresses a research question and details the methodological approach and data used for the analysis. Here I use this introduction as an opportunity to situate my positionality in this project. I follow and acknowledge the steps of Brisbois and Almeida (2017), who address how their social identities, privileges, and bias might influence their research. Like them, I also study the social and environmental dynamics of banana production on the Ecuadorian coast, grounding the research in ethnography and qualitative methods. My experience deals with how I see the banana – or how I grew up seeing the banana in Los Angeles, California and Ecuador. This includes recognizing things such as the frontline communities exposed to toxic pollutants emitted from the ports, and diesel trucks hauling the banana to the supermarket or acknowledging how bananas and other fruits are used by street vendors that battle illegality every day in Los Angeles. At the same time, noting my positionality also highlights the privileges of a researcher and perceived privileges that people think I have in the field, and how that might shape the way they interact with me. My educational background can be seen as a privilege or my ability to travel and conduct fieldwork in Ecuador. I always noted up front in my interviews that I am both from the north and Ecuadorian. And I often shared with my collaborators that I am a first-generation college graduate – and that my dad was deported, to help debunk whatever privileges they might assume I have. However, my background coupled with my gender might still shape how respondents share their experiences of working on the plantation.

From a young age I have always written about my experiences in Ecuador. I have school projects dating to the 1990s. My parents are Ecuadorian and settled in Los Angeles in the early 1970s. I was born and raised in and throughout Los Angeles and often traveled to Guayaquil and Galapagos to visit family. This back and forth between Ecuador and Los Angeles makes me the person I am today – and it shapes my way of seeing the world. I speak both English and Spanish fluently – and invoke both my “LA” and Ecuadorian identity. I grew up thinking about social issues that transcend my neighborhood in Los Angeles, all the way to the Galapagos Islands. This is probably why I was drawn to being trained by and to think with sociologists and critical geographers. My back and forth between Ecuador and the U.S. means that my understanding of the Ecuadorian situation is always partial and in dialogue with scholars from the global north and south.

My first time in Ecuador as a researcher and graduate student was in 2012. For my masters’ degree in Natural Resources and Environment from the University of Michigan, I conducted a project that observed a national policy-making process that incorporated local grassroots organizations for the writing of food sovereignty related policies. Since then, my trips to Ecuador are always a mix of family visits and connecting with colleagues and research collaborators. In 2012, I initiated what is now a longtime relationship between various social movement organizations and non-governmental organizations including my key collaborator, the *Coordinadora Nacional Campesina – Eloy Alfaro* (CNC-EA). The CNC-EA is a key asset and collaborator in this research endeavor. CNC-EA formed in the 1990s as a response to political and economic instability in the country. The CNC-EA is a national-level organization that has 18 regional and local-level member organizations throughout the country. The CNC-EA provided access to local organizations on the coast that would be potential field sites for my dissertation project. I met with several leaders of local organizations who shared with me their daily struggles for survival and told me how members of the organizations are waiting for the state to respond to their claims to land. As many researchers might encounter, case studies change, and one adapts to the context. I never planned to study the banana, though I have always known about the importance of the banana to Ecuador. I grew up in Los Angeles eating *guineos* (bananas), as I grew up calling them, and learned about the dark side of the banana trade as an undergraduate. My dissertation started out as being about land and ended up being very much about bananas.

The CNC-EA connected me to the five agricultural associations on the coast that had recently benefited from the Plan Tierras land redistribution project. These local organizations had also recently become affiliated with the CNC-EA. I met the representatives of the associations in November 2018 outside of the central offices of MAG in Quito. We attended a meeting with a state official to discuss an issue the associations had with the former administrators of the banana plantations (I detail this meeting in Chapter One). After the meeting, we went to the CNC-EA offices to discuss the results of the meeting and to present my interest in studying their experience with Plan Tierras. The associations agreed to participate in the project, and we moved forward with planning visits to the plantations. The planning involved explaining to the CNC-EA and the associations the key questions driving the project, and how the case of the banana plantations would help us understand the outcomes of land redistribution. As I explained to them, I approach this project through ethnography, meaning that I am there to study the lived experience of land redistribution through interviews and observing the material impacts of landownership and banana production.

My approach to this research project is shaped by the relationship I have to the CNC-EA and their ability to contact their local organizations to grant me a site visit and interview. Without this credibility – a phone call from the CNC-EA – local organizations would be hesitant to speak with me, an outsider. The introduction that I am *a compañera de la CNC-EA* is a critical opening. On the ground, on the plantations ready to conduct interviews and observe the workday – I once again introduce myself and share my background and intention to study their lived experiences. I kept my interviews short in consideration of their work and often had to read into the body language to know that they had to leave the interview to continue work on the field. I made myself accommodate to whatever situation came my way and made sure that I was respectful of everyone's time. At the end, I only interviewed people who were there working on that day and available to take a short break for the interview. As I mentioned before and in a later chapter, my gender as a woman might influence whether and how respondents answer my questions truthfully. For example, when I asked men about women working in the packing plant, they all responded that they appreciate and encourage that women work beside them. Would they respond otherwise? Some women expressed they encounter sexual harassment and are uncomfortable in the workplace. I also consider that my affiliation to the CNC-EA

and having a chaperone during my initial introductions might also shape respondents and their willingness to answer my questions.

I know I am privileged to have had financial support for the research and writing of my dissertation. With dwindling funding opportunities for U.S. graduate students with international fieldwork, I secured funding for my research in what seemed to be a fortuitous time. Funding for this project shaped my research design and methodology. Between November 2018-November 2019, I was funded by the U.S. Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship for fieldwork in Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador. The funding was used to support my research collaborators and to visit the various plantations and social organizations, including flights and bus rides between Quito and Guayaquil and between Guayaquil and Machala. This funding was critical for engaging with my interlocutors and for compensating the organizations for their time. Cornell University's AWARE (Advancing Women in Agriculture through Research and Education) graduate fellowship financed the photovoice project held with the women banana workers. I am not sure I would have implemented this project sans the fellowship. My prior travels to Ecuador for preliminary research were also supported by internal grants from Cornell University, including the Institute for Social Sciences, an Einaudi International travel grant, and the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program travel and research grants. These short visits ultimately cemented my relationship with CNC-EA – I always visit them while in Quito. I returned from Ecuador to the U.S. right before the onset of COVID-19. I earned an Association of American University Women (2019-2020) Dissertation Fellowship and Cornell University's Provost Diversity Fellowship (Fall 2020) that provided financial support to write (and not work) and finish my dissertation. These later fellowships provided critical support for the writing of the dissertation during the global pandemic.

Methodology and Data Collection

I divided my fieldwork into two parts. The first half of my fieldwork was in the capital city, Quito. Living in the capital gave me access to the CNC-EA and key events and meetings among other social organizations and MAG – most conferences and meetings between universities and social movement organizations and

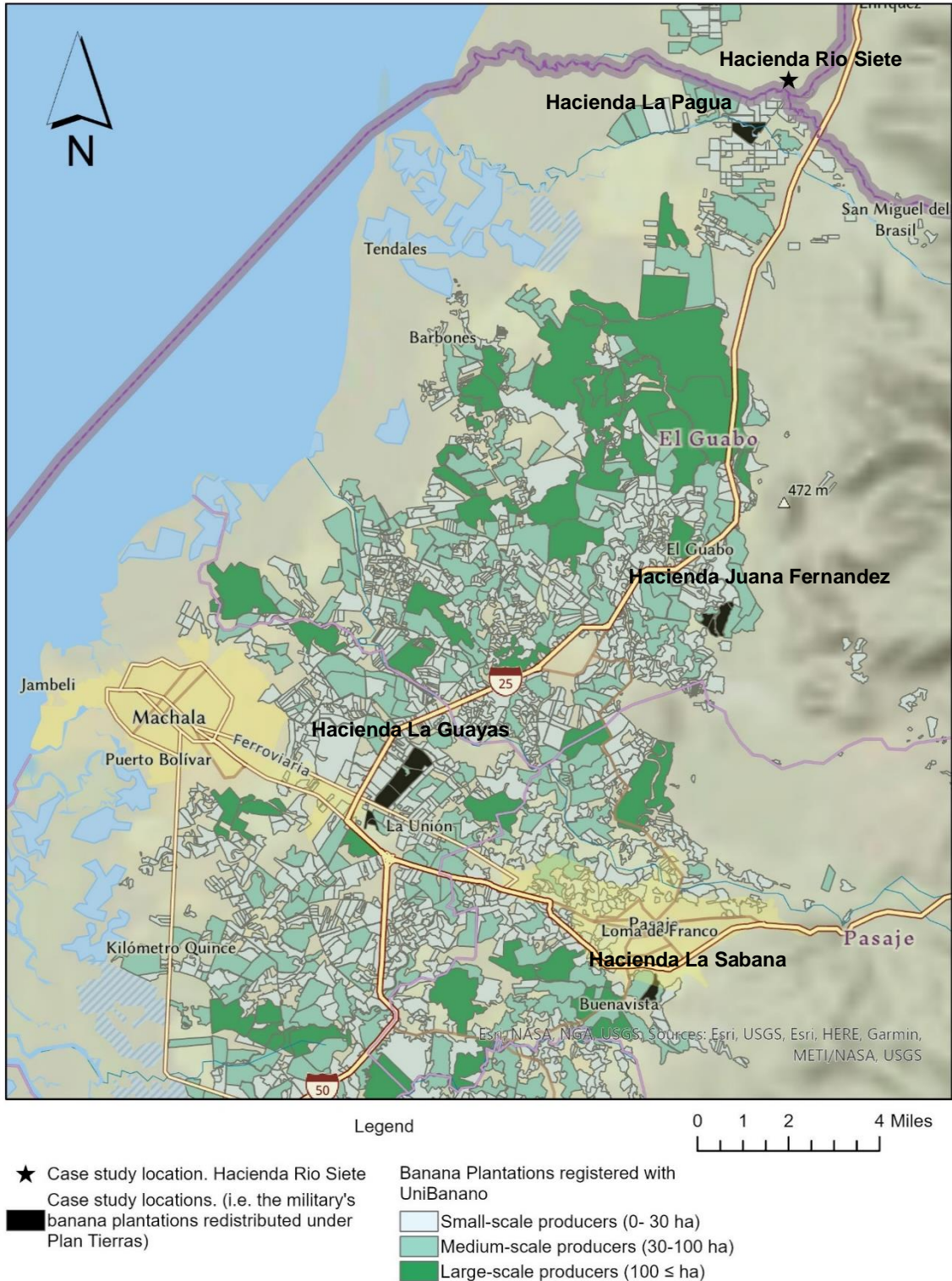
NGO's are held in Quito. I collected an array of reports, publications, news articles, legislation, and other relevant documents found in print and digital form in local libraries and historical archives including: Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio (Historical Archive of the Ministry of Culture and Patrimony), Archivo Histórico Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Historical Archive Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco of the Ministry of Exterior Relations); and the Archivo Nacional Ecuador (National Archive of Ecuador). I also collected material from the Archivo Histórico de Guayas (Historical Archive of Guayas). I searched for documents published by multiple state institutions with jurisdiction over rural lands such as local governments and state institutions such as MAG, the Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización (Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization – IERAC), and the Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agrario (National Institute for Agrarian Development – INDA). One report I found in the archive in Guayaquil is the 1961 *Recopilacion de Leyes, Estudios y Estadísticas del Banano Ecuatoriano* written by Jose T. San Andres, which details early legislation governing the banana industry, statistics, and marketing ads for national and foreign companies representing producers, exporters, machinery, and fertilizers. I also use primary resources found in U.S. archives and libraries, including a key letter and report held at Stanford University detailing the United Fruit Company's efforts to expand banana plantations in Ecuador in the 1920s.

While in Quito, I conducted interviews with state officials involved in the Subsecretaria de Tierras y Reforma Agraria (Subsecretary of Land and Agrarian Reform - STRA) and Plan Tierras. These interviews detail the internal decision-making processes of Plan Tierras, explaining why state officials make decision about the redistribution of land and explaining, from the state's point of view, the reasons why organizations fail to gain access to land from Plan Tierras. My initial plan was to sit in the offices of Plan Tierras and observe the everyday paperwork, site visits, and meetings. Unfortunately, while the program manager of Plan Tierras approved my approach to studying state bureaucracy, the central offices of the Ministry of Agriculture denied my request. A month later the program manager left Plan Tierras and another manager took his place. The turn-over reflects the broader trend in state institutions – the quick turn over in administrators that often stymies a case of land redistribution.

I moved to Guayaquil in March 2019. I lived in the downtown of Guayaquil, right in the heart of the city. Traveling from the city to the plantations gave me a glimpse into the day-to-day of urban-rural dynamics. The buses were a lens into the landscape and the people in it, in their everyday hustle and strategies of survival, selling whatever they can, from homemade orange juice, candy or bread, to a men's wallet for \$1. Sometimes I stayed in Machala to travel to further south to Hacienda La Guayas and Hacienda La Herrera. Figure 4. is a map showing the location of the haciendas and their proximity to each other and the major highways linking the banana plantations along the coast.

Figure 4. Map of banana production on the southern coast and the location of the five banana plantations used in this study

Dissertation Case Study Locations and Banana Plantations in the El Oro Province



I use ethnography to piece together the implementation of Plan Tierras and the scalar politics of social movements in Ecuador. Ethnography requires a researcher to immerse in a field site – that is, engagement with or within a social group, institutions, places, etc. – and is a methodological approach that is increasingly used to study contentious politics in Latin America (Fu and Simmons, 2021). This was a multi-sited ethnography that required I follow certain meetings and people, often limiting my presence on one plantation over the other. I traveled between Guayaquil and the plantations or flew between Guayaquil and Quito to meet with movement leaders and state officials. Most of my visits to the haciendas were Wednesday through Friday because those were the *días de embarque* (packaging days). I conducted semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and oral histories with the members and workers of the five associations. All interviews were conducted on site, where I observed work dynamics - from how water is pumped from the local rivers, to the cutting, washing, and packaging of the bananas. In the guadua bamboo plantations, I observed the harvest and hauling of the bamboo, a job held almost exclusively by men.

Table 3. Background information for the five associations

Association	Membership			Hacienda	Land (Ha)
	Men	Women	Total		
Asociación Agropecuaria “Chaguana”	23	10	33	Juana Fernández	67
Asociación Agropecuaria “La Pagua”	13	6	19	La Pagua	56
Asociación Agropecuaria “La Sabana”	13	2	15	La Herrera	39
Asociación Agropecuaria “La Guayas”	74	21	95	La Guayas	167
Asociación Agropecuaria “Rio Siete”	23	10	33	Rio Siete	333

I carried out the photovoice project in November of 2019, right after the October 2019 national strike and social protests. During the October 2019 protests, the roads throughout the major cities were blocked. The social protests brought together, indigenous social movements and working class, inter-provincial and city bus drivers, truck drivers, and taxi drivers, all in response to elevated gas and diesel prices. From my balcony in Guayaquil, I observed the marches and police brutality. I lived near *9 de Octubre*, the major boulevard used for most manifestations in the city leading to the Malecon, or to the riverfront. The road blockades mirrored the tactics of the 1990 Indigenous Uprising in Ecuador that was led by a coalition of

indigenous and peasant movements that ultimately forced the government to negotiate policy with indigenous leaders. While in Guayaquil, unable to travel to the plantations, I used my time to develop a “photovoice” project with the women banana workers. The single-use cameras capture how women respond to labor precarity and invoke their flexibility and ability to work in multiple sectors and places. Participants were tasked with documenting their lives in the household, work, and in the association. A total of 16 cameras were returned from the participants for processing, providing over 200 photographs of how women experience land rights and labor precarity on Ecuador’s southern coast. I used these images in a workshop that I held with over thirty women (See Figure 5). The results of this project are discussed in Chapter Three.

Figure 5. An example of a poster board with photographs from the photovoice project. The group sorted the photos in three different categories illustrating “a day in the life of a rural woman.”



Data Analysis

I conducted at least 80 in-depth interviews across the five associations. I hired assistants to help transcribe the interviews using the software F4. I assigned pseudonyms to the participants to protect their identity throughout the dissertation. I follow the data and analysis techniques laid out in Saldaña’s (2016)

“The Coding Manual for Qualitative Methods” and coded my fieldnotes by hand and used qualitative software ATLAS.ti to code the transcribed interviews. I generated 45 Code Groups that reflect the answers to the questions I asked both members of the associations and workers for the associations. For example, the Code Group “GinaFruit” referred to how respondents discuss their relationship with the company GinaFruit. Within these answers, and combined with answers coded under “Exports,” I found that the banana contract for export brought economic security for the association, despite the company’s oversight of the production and packing process. Other code groups such as “working conditions for Hdineagros” and “women working” described individual experiences that evidence how new land rights have overwhelmingly improved the living and working conditions of the respondents. Land redistribution is the central theme and thread that weaves the three individual chapters together.

For my analysis, I juxtaposition Ecuador’s banana industry with other banana producing countries in Latin America and Caribbean. As I note in the articles, Ecuador’s banana trade is characterized by its system of contracting whereby producers supply a set number of bananas to exporters or merchants on a weekly and yearly basis. Whereas producers in other countries developed contracting systems with multi-national companies such as Chiquita, Dole, and Del Monte – over seventy percent of Ecuador’s banana exports are sourced from small and medium sized national producers and are exported by a wide-range of nationally based companies, individuals, and exporter associations. I analyzed my interviews and ethnographic data during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 and observed how the banana contract continually re-emerged in the news as a central theme that helped explain labor precarity in the region. The contract as an analytical lens reveals that unstable banana contracts, what I later define as unfulfilled or unreliable contracts, combined with the price variability for the box of bananas, effects small-scale producers’ ability to compete with large producers with longstanding contracts with exporters. When an exporter is unable to pay for the bananas, work opportunities dwindle, and workers’ wages are affected – ultimately contributing to flexible work contracts and labor precarity.

Land of Gold and Opportunity

Chapter One, “Waiting for the State: Ethnography, Local Grievances, and the Making of Social Movements” opens the dissertation with an analysis of the impasse in the redistribution of Hacienda Río Siete to the Association Río Siete. I argue that convoluted bureaucratic processes and overlapping jurisdiction among multiple state institutions with competing values for land, and the constant change in administration and legal procedures, hinder effective land redistribution. In the process of waiting for the state, Association Río Siete turned to a national movement organization to gain access to the state, with the hope of shaping the outcome of their case. I use political ethnography to study movement-state relations and how local land and labor struggles are incorporated into national social movements. The study of bureaucratic processes and state institutions highlights the internal workings of the state and social movements, revealing how networks and social movement actors in and out of the state create institutional channels for local organizations. Chapter One contributes to discussions about the role of political ethnography in the study of social movements, land politics, and political participation in Latin America.

Chapter Two “Exporting Hope: Land, Banana Contracts, and the Promise of Prosperity” centers the experiences of the associations La Chaguana and La Guayas and their contractual arrangement with a family-owned exporter named GinaFruit. In this chapter, I use a political ecology framework to study the meanings attributed to the contract and to the materiality of producing under contract. I argue the associations seek contracts with large-scale national exporters because they provide economic security, whereas national exporters seek contracts with small producers to control the quality of the banana and to expand their own market interests. Both producers and exporters imbue meanings of hope and prosperity in the banana that often reproduce and obscure labor precarity among the workers. The study of the contract also explains differentiation among land beneficiaries, suggesting that factors such as the scale of banana production, land tenure, and environmental and landscape conditions limit their ability to secure a contract and market opportunities. This chapter ultimately highlights life after land redistribution, and how the associations navigate opportunities and constraints as new landowners and banana growers in the global banana trade.

Chapter Three “Our Work is Never Done: Women, Land Rights, and Labor Flexibility” takes a close look into the gendered dynamics of land redistribution by analyzing the impacts of the Plan Tierras’ gender quota. I use feminist political ecology to analyze women’s experiences of landownership in the banana industry. I argue the gender quota enhanced women’s ownership of land, increased the number of women working on the plantations, and ensured higher incomes, while empowering women through leadership roles and participation in decision-making processes. Despite their membership in the association, women have limited work opportunities because of the gendered division of labor in the banana industry. Women in the association and women working for the associations often work in the packing plant and were only hired on *días de embarque (shipping days)*, meaning they often only work once to three times a week on one plantation and rotate to another plantation to generate enough income to support their families. I use a combination of photovoice and photo elicitation to demonstrate how women navigate labor precarity and invoke their flexibility to generate income in multiple ways, while also contributing to household social reproduction and unpaid family labor to the associations. This chapter contributes to broader discussions of women’s access to farmland and gendered disparities in the banana industry.

I summarize the main contributions of the dissertation and discuss future lines of research in the conclusion of the dissertation.

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CHAPTER ONE
WAITING FOR THE STATE: ETHNOGRAPHY, LOCAL GRIEVANCES,
AND THE MAKING OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Introduction

In Ecuador, over half a million people harvest bamboo for personal use, building materials, and for export to international markets. Bamboo is versatile, cheap to produce, and contributes to the local economy and sustainability. Bamboo is cultivated in plantations or found in dispersed natural clusters, covering about 600,026 hectares or 2% of the country's surface (MAG, 2018). The *guadua angustifolia*, commonly known in Ecuador as the *caña guadua* or guadua bamboo, can grow up to one hundred feet. Bamboo cultivation is the main source of income for Association Rio Siete, a membership-based organization that collectively manages a large-scale guadua plantation called Hacienda Rio Siete. The members of the association are former plantation workers of Hdineagros, a military company that managed Hacienda Rio Siete and several banana plantations throughout the southern coast. In 2012, the former workers formed the association in order to apply to the *Plan Tierras* land redistribution program and obtain land rights to the military's plantations. To date, the redistribution of Hacienda Rio Siete is at an impasse, preventing the association from applying for a forestry and commercialization license and rendering it unable to access loans and credits to improve and diversify their production. Men usually harvest the guadua, leaving women to look for work in neighboring banana plantations instead.

I analyze waiting as it unfolds across space and time. Between 2018-2019, I interviewed members of Association Rio Siete and visited Hacienda Rio Siete to observe the living and working conditions. I also reviewed government documents, reports, and I interviewed state officials to understand why the association remains at a standstill in their quest for land ownership. I argue convoluted bureaucratic processes, characterized by overlapping jurisdiction among multiple state institutions with competing values for land, coupled with the constant change in administration and legal procedures hinder effective land redistribution. In the state of in-betweenness, members of Association Rio Siete harvest the guadua, work on neighboring

banana plantations, travel to the city to meet with state officials, and return to the land to wait. Overtime, the association turned waiting into a grievance and joined a national-movement organization in hopes that it would shape the outcome of their case. Waiting is a temporal and spatial process that in this case, allows for disparate struggles for land to coalesce and contribute to social movement formation.

This article has four sections. In the first section, I discuss the political economy of waiting and waiting as an analytical lens used to study land politics and state-social movement relations. The second section provides context for the case study and the methodology. In the third section, I detail the two key institutional factors preventing the redistribution of Hacienda Rio Siete to Association Rio Siete. In the fourth section, I detail why local organizations join national-movement organizations and how the relationship is mutually beneficial. I conclude the article with a discussion about the association's goals to diversify production and to provide work opportunities for women, and the limitations of setting a value on land redistribution.

Rural Development at an Impasse

At the turn of the century, progressive governments in Latin America instituted a range of rural development projects aimed at alleviating poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition. In Ecuador, under Rafael Correa's administration (2006-2017), Plan Tierras (2010-2014) was an initiative that aimed to redistribute state patrimony to the rural landless and peasant farmers. These state lands were either state lands or formerly privately-owned large agricultural estates that underwent bankruptcy because of the economic crisis of 1998. Borras (2007) argues that a land reform must affect pre-existing agrarian structures and change the flow of resources from the landed to the landless. The redistribution of land means effective control over the nature, pace, extent, and direction of surplus production and distribution (22). The redistribution of the military's guadua and banana plantations to the former workers is a step towards addressing unequal land rights in Ecuador. However, as noted in Borra's analysis of land reform in the Philippines, the degree of redistribution depends on the value associated with the land – that is, the compensation that is given to private landowners for their expropriated land and the price beneficiaries must pay for the land transfer. Plan Tierras requires beneficiaries of land such as rural associations, trade unions, and cooperatives, to pay back

the state for the land within a ten-year period. Yet in some cases of redistribution, beneficiaries are unable to generate revenue from their production, making it difficult for them to pay back the state. This can eventually lead them to fall into debt (Jaramillo Carrillo, 2021) or leave them unable to produce enough to ensure their own food security (Landivar Garcia et al., 2013).

The association Rio Siete has been waiting for the state to transfer the land title since they applied to Plan Tierras in 2012. I analyze waiting in the context of people waiting for land policies to materialize (Chung, 2020). Liminality is about waiting for the state to respond to paperwork or a phone call or waiting for land appraisal to take place on the plantation. Waiting for the state is a power dynamic wherein subordination and domination are created and re-created through innumerable acts of waiting and making others wait. The power relationship is embodied in a “patient model” that Auyero (2011) argues is wherein “welfare clients learn, in practice, to be patients of the state.” Waiting involves temporal and spatial processes in that waiting happens in the offices and on the plantation. As I later describe in detail, Association Rio Siete turned waiting for the state into a grievance and political opportunity - they joined a national movement organization in hopes that it would open an institutional channel to the state and shape the outcome of their case.

Association Rio Siete joined one of the leading indigenous-peasant national-movement organizations, the Coordinadora Nacional Campesina – Eloy Alfaro (National Peasant Network - “Eloy Alfaro” (CNC-EA). Indigenous and peasant social movements in Ecuador are headed by national-level social movement organizations such as the CNC-EA alongside other prominent national organizations such as the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador (Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality (Ecuadorian)), and the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras (National Confederation of Campesinos, Indigenous, the Ecuadorian Africans Organizations (FENOCIN)). These national organizations have a long history of social mobilization and are important political actors that gained worldwide recognition in June 1990 for leading an indigenous uprising that blocked highways and paralyzed the country for a week (Becker, 2008). During the 1980s and 1990s, the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms and the privatization of indigenous land and territory led

to the mobilization of indigenous social movements and initiated the longstanding political campaign against neoliberalism in the region (Silva, 2009). In Ecuador, volatile traditional parties and social mobilizations in the streets combined with ethnic-based grievances fostered a political opening for the formation of the first indigenous political party Pachakutik that shaped the constitutional reform in 1998 which in turn instituted broader indigenous rights in the country (Yashar, 2005; Roberts, 2014). Between 2007-2008, the indigenous and peasant movements in Ecuador participated in constituent assemblies that enshrined food sovereignty into the 2008 national constitution and joined regional efforts to push for land reform and land redistribution. Social movements also pressured the state to incorporate and uphold gender-focused mechanisms in land policies such as naming women as direct beneficiaries of land and incorporating gender quotas for land redistribution programs such as Plan Tierras (Deere, 2019).

Beyond electoral politics, social movement leaders and representatives are often incorporated into state roles and institutions, making the state-society distinction blurry. In these state roles, movement representatives attempt to influence policy from within the state, albeit with limitations. My analysis of the relationship between Association Rio Siete and CNC-EA is illustrative of the social-spatial dynamics of movement-building and the tactics for engaging with the state and influencing policy.

I use political ethnography as a methodological tool that offers insights into routine politics and collective action in the Latin American context (Arias, 2009). Political ethnography pays attention to bureaucratic processes - the mundane paperwork and meetings - and is a lens to closely observe the power dynamics in state institutions and the covert negotiations between bureaucrats and movement leaders (Auyero and Joseph, 2007). In this article, I use political ethnography to piece together how local and national state institutional practices hinder the effective redistribution of Hacienda Rio Siete to Association Rio Siete. I also use in-depth interviews and participant observations that offer insights into the micro-level and internal decision-making processes of social movement organizations (Almeida, 2019). Ethnography and interviews with movement leaders and movement participants can uncover the continuum of reasons why individuals join social movements (Wolford, 2010). Ethnography and the in-depth observation of local social organizations can also

reveal how grievances are linked to material life and how threats to subsistence shape mobilization (Simmons, 2014).

Context and Methodology

For several months between 2018-2019, I took a two-hour bus ride south from Guayaquil to Hacienda Rio Siete to visit the guadua plantations and interview the members of the association. Hacienda Rio Siete is in Camilo Ponce Enrique, a sprawling town with a population of twenty-one thousand, that draws people from other provinces to work in small-scale mines in the foothills and in banana and cacao plantations in the lowlands (GAD Camilo Ponce Enrique, 2021). The highway connecting Guayaquil to the south cuts through Camilo Ponce Enrique and is the main street in town. The bus stop is on this main street, where there are businesses bustling with music, people selling food and drinks on the street and getting ready to jump on the bus, and a local traffic controller patrolling car traffic and people crossing the street. I often met with Maria Alejandra, president of Rio Siete, by the *Sana Sana* pharmacy on the main street. From the bus stop, we would take a pick-up truck taxi to Hacienda Rio Siete, which gets its name from the local river Rio Siete that meanders through the plantation and is a source of water, despite the contamination from mining upstream. The taxi drives west on unpaved roads, passing over a creek that often overflows with mud and debris to the point that one can't drive or walk over it. Hacienda Rio Siete encompasses 333 hectares of land in the lowlands and stands out in the landscape because of the giant bamboo that creates an arch near the entrance. The giant bamboo clustered together creates a cool and shaded area amidst the tropical heat and humidity.

The members of Association Rio Siete are former plantation workers of the military company called Hdineagros. In 2012, Hugo Cabezas, the former manager of Hdineagros, gathered 300 to 350 workers on the third floor of the Hdineagros building to announce the plan to redistribute the military's plantations. The building was located on a major highway near one of the military's haciendas and served as a central location to oversee the rest of the haciendas scattered in El Oro. The building was eventually demolished for a modern cloverleaf exchange that greatly enhanced and improved traffic circulation in the region. The workers were first told they would get *solares* – land parcels where they would be able to construct their own homes.

The idea quickly turned to redistributing the haciendas to one single cooperative and later, -- and finally -- to redistributing the haciendas to five agricultural associations. The idea of the cooperative stemmed from the military's former process of managing and sourcing bananas from their seven haciendas throughout the area. The decentralization and distribution of the haciendas among the associations gives each association autonomy over production and commercialization of their own hacienda that might not have been possible with a cooperative. The workers of Hdineagros organized into five associations in 2012 to apply to the Plan Tierras redistribution program. In 2015, four of the five agricultural associations gained the provisional land title to the military's banana producing haciendas. Association Rio Siete is the fifth association and the sole producer of guadua among the associations waiting for the state to legally recognize their ownership over Hacienda Rio Siete.

The Plan Tierras project was intended to reduce land inequality by increasing access to land through land redistribution. In 2010, Ramon Espinel, the former minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, led a study that identified up to one million peasants without land or with little land. The plan was to redistribute 2.5 million hectares of land within four years to reduce the Gini coefficient, an indicator of inequality, from .8 to .69 (Rosero, 2011). These initial figures were ambitious and underfunded such that by 2014, Plan Tierras was replaced by another project called *Acceso a Tierras de los productores familiares y legalización masiva en el territorio Ecuatoriano* (ATLM), the Access to Land project. The ATLM extends Plan Tierras's efforts for redistribution to a nation-wide land titling and land legalization project.

Former president of Ecuador Rafael Correa (2006-2017) issued Presidential Decree 435 on July 26, 2010 and established the platform for state institutions to transfer their underutilized land holdings to INMOBILIAR, the *Servicio de Gestión Inmobiliaria del Sector Público* (Public Sector Property Management Service). Under the presidential decree, between 2012-2013 the military transferred 20,564.32 hectares of land for redistribution, including 14,589.66 hectares to the Ministry of the Environment for ecological projects, 5,876.32 hectares for Plan Tierras, and 98.34 hectares for local governments and other state institutions (El Telegrafo, 2013). Between 2010-2019, the Plan Tierras program redistributed nearly 25,000 hectares of state lands to 85 social organizations (MAG, 2018).

Plan Tierras is housed within the *Subsecretaría de Tierras y Reforma Agraria* (Subsecretary of Land and Agrarian Reform - STRA), within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG). STRA was created in 2010 to replace the former *Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agrario* (Institute for National Agricultural Development) and is responsible for administering land titles, land surveys, and land redistribution, including the implementation of Plan Tierras. In 2018, I interviewed state officials in STRA and Plan Tierras to understand the process of redistribution and why Río Siete's case was at an impasse. The Association Río Siete is waiting for the *Providencia de adjudicación*, the provisional land title that legally recognizes the association as the landowner of Hacienda Río Siete. Alongside the provisional title, beneficiaries are given a management plan that describes in detail the land-use practices and the estimated earnings from production required to pay back the state. The beneficiaries have an initial two-year grace period to transition into their new roles as landowners. Thereafter, payments for the land must be made to the state.

Figure 6. The guadua bamboo harvested and growing in Hacienda Rio Siete



Association Rio Siete has 33 members, 23 men and 10 women. Most of the men in the association worked in the guadua plantation for Hdineagros and incorporated their wives, sisters, and partners to meet the Plan Tierras program's gender quota that requires that women make up thirty percent of the membership. Many of them migrated from Manabi, a province north of Guayaquil, in the 1990s looking for work in the banana plantations and found their way to Rio Siete. Work in the guadua plantation is primarily designated to men, and women often cook lunch for the workers or work at the neighboring banana and cacao plantations. The President of Association Rio Siete organized interviews for me with members who lived and worked on the hacienda. A few members have left the hacienda in search of work opportunities elsewhere because of the economic insecurity of producing guadua without a land title. I interviewed a total of 13 members of Rio Siete; 10 men and 3 women. I asked questions about how they navigate state bureaucracy and the every-day uncertainty and about their affiliation to the CNC-EA. I analyzed transcripts of the interviews using Atlas.Ti and coded the interviews for attitudes about state institutions, bureaucratic processes, land ownership, social movements, and hopes for the future. I combine these interviews with my participant observations to detail how local social organizations cope with waiting for the state.

This history of Hacienda Rio Siete is partial and based on the limited interviews held with members of Association Rio Siete and the manager Hugo Cabeza. The military government of the 1970s created the *Dirección de Industrias del Ejército* (Department for Military Industries – DINE) in 1973 to manage investment opportunities, to harness public-private partnerships, and to institutionalize the military’s role in economic development. Over time, the military owned and managed land for agricultural export as part of their contribution to national development. In 2000, DINE created HoldingDine, S.A. Corporación Industrial y Comercial, a company that managed the assets and investments of the institution, and that also founded Hdineagros as a subsidiary company that would produce and commercialize bananas. In 2005, under the administration of Hdineagros, the banana plantations in Hacienda Rio Siete were converted to guadua plantations because the quality of bananas declined and the guadua bamboo seemed like a lucrative venture. In 2010, all assets of HoldingDine were transferred to the *Instituto de Seguridad Social de las Fuerzas Armadas* (Institute for Social Security of the Armed Forces – ISSFA) for liquidation. This was part of disinvesting the military from national economic development and adhering to the 2008 Constitution which prohibits the military from participating in economic activities unrelated to national defense (Article 162).

I encountered Association Rio Siete through my longtime collaboration with the CNC-EA. The CNC-EA is a national-level movement organization that encompasses 18 provincial-level and local-level social organizations throughout the country. Leaders of peasant organizations convened in the 1980s and formed the CNC-EA as a space of *encuentro*, or gathering, of organizations to formulate a political agenda that favored the peasantry and the rural poor. Since the 1990s, the CNC-EA has mobilized against neoliberal economic reforms that undermine land and territorial rights and it has pushed for legislating new land policies centered on food sovereignty and multiculturalism during the constituent assembly of 2007. It has also participated in the process of writing the 2009 Food Sovereignty Law and the 2016 Law on Land and Territory.

Romelio Gualan, the President of CNC-EA, was the *Secretaría General del Sistema de Relacionamento Productivo* (Subsecretary of Rural Production) during a short period of time in former President Lenin Moreno’s (2017-2021) earlier administration, and he met with Association Rio Siete during his tenure. Gualan’s ability to move in and out of state institutions points to the flexible boundaries of state-society

relations and helps explain why local associations join and participate in national movement organizations. My analysis of movement-building is based on multiple years of participating and observing the relationship between local organizations and CNC-EA at meetings, events, and conferences, including meetings with state officials. In these meetings, often held at local universities or in the CNC-EA office headquarters in Quito, I learned that maintaining national movement networks requires harnessing relationships, reciprocity, and consistent dialogue among organizations, academics, research institutions, and current and former state representatives.

Waiting for the State

Entering Hacienda Rio Siete, one sees the river Rio Siete on the left side of the road and a giant bamboo corridor on the other side, at least one hundred feet in height. The hacienda was *lotelizado* – parceled into areas of cultivation that had direct access to the major road in the hacienda. Of the 200 hectares of guadua planted, the associations only have physical access to about 50 hectares. The guadua plantations were destroyed in a flash flood in 2008. Since then, the workers have slowly carved out sections of the plantations to make a clear pathway to the road. Rotting bamboo sits along the road while new harvest grows intermixed with bamboo the workers restored after the flood. Remnants of Hdineagros – old and deteriorating buildings and a rusted and defunct tractor – sit as a relic and a nuisance next to the new cement office and recently built bamboo homesteads.

More than half of bamboo – both in plantations and natural settings – are found along the coastal region, thriving from the tropical micro weather of the coastal lowlands. The bamboo is ready for harvest after five years of growth. The workers, usually men, cut the bamboo with a machete and then drag it to a pile of bamboo along the road. Using mules or horses, the workers haul the bamboo from the field to the front of the hacienda. The bamboo is placed in a bath with borax and water to cure from pests and disease. Once the bamboo is cured, it is later cut to the client's preferred length.

The bamboo is used locally and is exported. About 19% of bamboo produced is dedicated for building materials and household use (MAG, 2019). The bamboo is also used in the local banana plantations to help

prop the banana and support the stem against strong winds and heavy rains. In the last decade, the export of guadua bamboo has increased, prompting MAG to design a national strategy for bamboo that aims to increase production and value-added, increase exports, and to enter the carbon market. For example, MAG (2019) reports that one hectare of the guadua bamboo can capture 12 tons of CO₂ and contribute to international sustainable development goals.

The bamboo from Hacienda Rio Siete is sold to local and international markets. Hugo Cabeza told me the guadua sold at \$1.50 to intermediaries and then sold in Peru or Chile for \$5 or \$7. Miguel, who is married to a member of the association, told me that without the proper certifications and licensing, they undersell their bamboo to intermediaries. Without the land title, the association is limited in obtaining a forestry license to sell the guadua bamboo directly to their clients. The association is unable to transport the guadua without the proper commercialization license and is unable to seek credits or loans to invest in improving the infrastructure of the hacienda and diversify production.

In 2019, the national monthly minimum salary was \$395. When asked about the monthly income, members expressed distress in making enough money to support their family.

“We have to work here; work the 8 hours and then look for another *cachuelito* (side job) outside to survive because sometimes the monthly salary is not enough. Sometimes it is \$100 or \$50 dollars. I have kids that [go to school] and [the income] is not enough... Sometimes I leave [the hacienda] at 4 or 3 in the afternoon and work until 6 or 7 at night at side jobs” said Enrique, a member of Rio Siete.

In my interviews with the members of Rio Siete, they reported they earned the minimum salary but mentioned they worked outside of the plantation to generate additional income. The uncertainty of the ownership of the land shapes opportunities to establish long-term contracts with intermediaries or exporters and guarantee a monthly income for the association.

Waiting for the state places more of a burden on women living in the plantations because of the limited work opportunities available to them. Rather, women help with communal efforts, such as cooking and selling food to fundraise to buy supplies for the association. In one instance, the women organized a soccer tournament and sold food to purchase the cable necessary to expand electricity in the hacienda. Association Rio Siete has the long-term goal to diversify production in the hacienda to provide opportunities for

employment to the members and their families, especially women. The association raised funds to purchase seeds and planted cacao on five hectares with the goal that it yield harvest in three to five years. Labor in the association is based on collective work or the *minga*, where the *socios* (members) prepare the land for harvest or clear the land for new growth. Planting cacao would provide women with work and income opportunities they currently lack. While the Association Rio Siete waits for their land title, the members and their families live off the land and work for local banana plantations to generate additional income.

Maria Alejandra, who was the president of the association at the time of my research, also worked two days out of the week packing bananas for the Association La Pagua, one of the beneficiaries of the military's banana plantations. As she told me, there are limited work opportunities for women who are members of the association. For the members and their families living on the plantation, they grow their own food on their plot of land and sell chickens to their neighbors for income. The association needs the land title to Hacienda Rio Siete so they can clear the land to diversify production and expand work opportunities for women.

Institutional setbacks

I met Elvis for a coffee at the food court of the Mol del Sol in Guayaquil to learn about his role as an *ingeniero agrónomo* (agronomist) and land surveyor for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG). We met at the mall because he was furloughed a few days before, evidence of the quick turnover within the institution and the setbacks in land titling I learned about in my prior interviews. I first met him during a site visit in Hacienda Rio Siete. He arrived with two others in a pickup truck ready to survey the hacienda when I was in the middle of an interview with Maria Alejandra, president of the Association Rio Siete, and with Juan Pablo, who is married to a member of the association and works in the plantation. Elvis' visit was unannounced— but we stopped the interview and climbed onto the bed of the truck to listen to Juan Pablo describe the landscape changes. Juan Pablo stops the driver, and we get off to look at bamboo rotting on the road. He points to where Rio Siete overflowed and destroyed the plantations. The recovery has been a slow process because the associations need a tractor to clear the rotting and damaged bamboo. Elvis' visit to the hacienda documented the hacienda boundaries, agricultural production, the bamboo plantations, housing, and other infrastructure. His report ultimately helped the association gain access to a forestry license to sell the

guadua. While this is a significant win for the association, they have yet to receive the provisional land title to the hacienda, limiting their opportunity to apply to loans and credits to invest inputs and tractors that would facilitate diversified production.

I argue there are two institutional factors that are preventing the redistribution of Hacienda Rio Siete to the association: 1) overlapping jurisdiction among state institutions with competing value of land and 2) constant change in administration and (de)concentration of bureaucratic processes. A defining characteristic of this setback is that Association Rio Siete produces guadua and the four other associations produce bananas. Both the guadua and the banana are regulated by different state institutions with their own set of bureaucratic processes and procedures. However, under the subsurface of Hacienda Rio Siete lies oil, further complicating the value of the land and the redistribution of land to the association. The redistribution of the banana-producing haciendas took several years, but the setback was due to Hdineagros refusing to leave the haciendas.

Three state institutions with jurisdiction over Hacienda Rio Siete are thwarting the process of redistribution and production, including MAG; the Ministry of Energy evaluating the oil reserves in the subsoil; and the Ministry of Environment that regulates the bamboo plantations and license to export. Elvis surveyed Rio Siete based on a request from the central offices of MAG in Quito, helping the association gain access to a forestry certification and greater market opportunities. The STRA is waiting for the Ministry of Energy to evaluate the value of Hacienda Rio Siete, which according to Hugo Cabeza, is estimated to cost nearly 1 million dollars. Under the Plan Tierras redistribution program, the beneficiaries are responsible for paying the state “a social value” for the land, a price lower than market price, within a ten-year period. However, the guadua plantations are not in the condition to generate enough revenue for Association Rio Siete to pay for the land. MAG is tasked with negotiating with the Ministry of Energy for a value that is aligned with the conditions of the hacienda’s productivity. During this process, members of Association Rio Siete are in a state of liminality, anxiously waiting for their land title to apply for credits and loans, to invest in and improve the working and living conditions for their families.

A second critical setback in the process is the constant change in administration and processes that trickled down from the MAG to STRA, and to Plan Tierras. Clara, who has worked for Plan Tierras for several years told me “The main issue is the change in administration...new authorities come with different politics and different visions and sometimes processes end up in an impasse.” Elvis further confirmed this and told me about the administrative turnover, from the central offices in Quito to the local offices in Guayaquil, are a critical setback in the process of redistribution. New administrators in MAG often means a turnover of employees. New employees must catch up on the cases and familiarize themselves with the social organization beneficiary of Plan Tierras. Elvis told me “*Documentos duermen*” – paperwork sleeps unless the organizations are pressuring the state worker to respond to their calls and respond to their case.

The members of Association Rio Siete told me they often would lose track of the state worker responsible for their case because of the turnover in the central offices. Following up on their case was nearly impossible with the change in administration and (de)centralization of powers within the Guayaquil and Quito offices. A key issue in any *tramite* or paperwork in dealing with state bureaucracy requires long-distance travels from El Oro to Quito, about a 10–12-hour bus ride. These trips are often costly for the members of the association, and it requires leaving work for at least two days. Until recently, the processes of Plan Tierras took place in four regional offices – Guayas, Esmeraldas, Santo Domingo, and Chimborazo— and in Quito, the central office. The minister of MAG Xavier Lazo Guerrero on September 21, 2018 signed an accord, *Acuerdo Ministerial 116*, that decentralized a series of responsibilities from the central office to the new *Direcciones Distritales*, District Departments. The 2016 Law on Land and Territory (Article 126) shaped this process, attributing these new decision-making powers to the provinces. The decentralization of the process gives power to the district offices to resolve local land titling efforts, including petitions for Plan Tierras. The recent changes allow individuals and associations like Rio Siete to submit paperwork to their local land titling offices. This also means that provincial-level state workers can plan site visits accordingly and not catch one by surprise like Elvis did.

Bridging Local and National Grievances

Victoria is a member of Association La Guayas, one of the five associations that formed alongside Rio Siete to apply to Plan Tierras. Association La Guayas has 95 members, produces bananas for export, and obtained their *adjudicación*, or provincial land title, in 2015. Victoria worked for Hdineagros in the central offices in Machala as an administrator of the company's finances. My first interview with her was during a car ride in December 2018 when she picked me up from my hotel in downtown Machala and brought me to Hacienda La Central, one of the three haciendas owned by Association La Guayas. As she drove, she told me about how important it was for the associations – La Guayas, Rio Siete, and the other three – to join CNC-EA. The four associations with provisional land titles have a dispute with Hdineagros over the terms of a contract that requires that the associations pay for the “*activos fijos y activos biológicos*,” which translates to paying for the company's investment in the bananas and fixed infrastructure on the land. One of the contracts signed between the associations and Hdineagros stipulates the organization pay an amount of US \$228,812.64 for the “*activos fijos y activos biológicos*”. The value of the banana is worth more than the value of the land. Victoria tells me they were advised by Plan Tierras' state workers not to sign the contract with Hdineagros - but were compelled and convinced by Hugo Cabeza to sign the contract because the company helped them gain rights to the plantations. The associations told me they made a mistake and that the transfer of land from the state means the transfer of everything on that land, even the bananas. In other words, they are not supposed to pay for the bananas and yet the company convinced them they had to.

In the same week the associations had a meeting with the military's social security institute ISSFA to discuss the terms of the contract with Hdineagros and penalties for non-payment for the bananas, Victoria traveled to the MAG in Quito in search of help and advice on the case. She attended an event last-minute where she was introduced to Romelio Gualan, who was the president of CNC-EA and a state official who oversaw the *Secretaría General del Sistema de Relacionamento Productivo* (Subsecretary of Rural Production). Victoria invited Romelio Gualan to El Oro to visit the hacienda La Central and to discuss their issue with Hdineagros and about the impasse in Rio Siete's redistribution. Even though the association La Guayas has their provisional land title, they joined CNC-EA because they were convinced the associations needed to gain

fortaleza, or strength and support in navigating state bureaucracy. Victoria recognized the power of national-level movement organizations in negotiating with the state. At the meeting with ISSFA, Victoria and the associations were firm in their stance of not paying for the bananas because they are the legal owners of the land and the bananas. The penalties would probably be a lawsuit against the association.

Before our car ride and first visit to the plantation, I met with Victoria and the representatives of the five associations for the first time in November 2018 in front of MAG. I introduced myself and took the elevator with about seven representatives to the third floor of the building to meet with the director of STRA. Gualan had helped set this meeting up days before. The assistant to the director of STRA had a stack of manila folders and debriefed him about the case at the meeting. It was clear he was learning about the situation as the representatives explained their problem with Hdineagros. The meeting lasted less than an hour and the director of STRA told us the contract with Hdineagros was a private matter and should be dealt with between lawyers. There was no time to hear about Rio Siete's impasse. The associations explained in the meeting that they are the rightful owners of the bananas because they have historically and collectively labored every day for the banana. After the meeting, we took a taxi and debriefed at the CNC-EA headquarters and discussed the next steps in resolving their case – stop paying Hdineagros for the bananas and continue to pressure state officials to move forward on the case of Rio Siete. It was clear from this meeting that the associations are “patients of the state” – consistently waiting for state workers to respond to phone calls and to paperwork with no resolution in sight. This is evident for Association Rio Siete, which dwells in uncertainty while navigating state bureaucratic processes. This process of waiting for the state, prompted the associations to turn to CNC-EA in hopes that the movement organization can shape the outcome of their case.

CNC-EA's influence in the case of Rio Siete is limited, illustrating that joining social movements is not always successful. However, Association Rio Siete's participation in the CNC-EA along with the four banana-producing associations strengthens the movement's local base and broadens the scope of their political agenda.

The CNC-EA holds workshops locally and nationally that give member organizations training on issues of political history, agrarian policy, and labor rights, and it has structures in place that train representatives in

leadership skills. National organizations such as the CNC-EA benefit from the expansion of their membership base. The organization brings together ethnic-based grievances from peasant and indigenous organizations in the Andean highlands and class-based grievances from banana and guadua bamboo plantation workers on the southern coast. The new membership also expands the local network on the coast, and sheds lights onto the place-based dynamics of movement-building in Ecuador.

In May 2019, I attended one of CNC-EA's trainings with the five associations, held at Hacienda La Central. The workshop took place in the packing plant, where we laid out plastic chairs throughout the area and gathered over fifty participants. In small working groups, the members were asked to identify key challenges within the association, including any conflicts in decision-making processes. The facilitator of CNC-EA used a white board to list the issues for one of the associations. Listed were issues such as "Work in a team," "resolve differences," and "complete the [international] certification [for export]." The role of the facilitator is to help the associations navigate these internal tensions and help make them a somewhat cohesive unit. In this process, the CNC-EA shapes the political identity of the local associations and contributes to building the movement organization.

The national movement organization brings the local associations into a broader struggle for land and labor rights they were never exposed to before. CNC-EA is affiliated to the transnational social movement *Vía Campesina* and has a leadership role in the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC), which together advocate for an integral agrarian reform, sustainable development, and food sovereignty, and have an overall commitment to social justice (Deere and Royce, 2009). Victoria from Association La Guayas traveled to Cuba for an international conference that introduced her to a global network of movement leaders. For Maria Alejandra, the CNC-EA provides a guide and pathway for resolving their case and for growing and developing as a producer association. The associations are not bypassing the state by joining the CNC-EA, but rather creating an affective and reciprocal relationship that serves to bring them closer to the state. Maria Alejandra compared the relationship between Rio Siete and CNC-EA as familial - and Gualan as a fierce leader and father who is helping the local associations navigate state bureaucracy and obtain their land

rights. Indeed, with limitations. Without the structure and guidance of the CNC-EA, the association feels powerless and hopeless as they wait for the state and their provisional land title.

I asked members of Rio Siete what they hoped for in the future as legal landowners. Most responded with enthusiasm: to expand and create opportunities for tourism and diversified production. They told me they would like to construct an ecological park that highlights the versatility of the guadua bamboo. With the land title, the Association Rio Siete also plans to diversify its production and create more work and income opportunities for the members and their families. Planting the five hectares of cacao is one step towards including women in the business venture.

Conclusion

The production of the guadua bamboo is the primary source of income for members of Association Rio Siete, an organization that manages a large-scale guadua plantation within the confines of Hacienda Rio Siete. Members of Association Rio Siete were former plantation workers for the military company Hdineagros. Workers of Hacienda Rio Siete organized themselves into the Association Rio Siete to apply to the Plan Tierras land redistribution program. Since applying in 2012, Association Rio Siete has waited for the state to relinquish the provisional land title for the hacienda – the land title with their name on it that would allow them to apply for a forestry and commercialization license and to access loans and credits to improve their production. Women make up a third of the association yet lack work opportunities in the guadua plantation because the harvest is overwhelmingly done by men.

In this article, I argue there are two institutional factors that hinder the effective redistribution of Hacienda Rio Siete to Association Rio Siete. First, three state institutions have jurisdictions over Hacienda Rio Siete that are thwarting the redistribution. The three state institutions, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the Ministry of Energy and Ecology, and the Ministry of the Environment have competing estimates for the economic value of Hacienda Rio Siete, preventing the program case manager from transferring the property title to the association. One issue is the subsurface oil reserve underneath Hacienda Rio Siete and the surrounding area, and the estimated value of over one million dollars for the hacienda. The association is unable to generate enough revenue from the guadua plantation to make the high value

payments to the state. The second institutional setback is comprised of the constant and sudden changes in administration and the (de)concentration of bureaucratic processes. The change in administration often means there is a turn-over in employees that prevents the case from moving forward. Only recently was the land titling process decentralized, allowing for applicants to apply for their land title locally within their province. For Association Rio Siete, this means shortening the distance of travel from the southern coast to the capital city of Quito, a 12-hour bus ride that representatives from the association often took overnight to turn in paperwork.

In this article, I argue waiting is a temporal and spatial process. In in the process of waiting for the state to respond to their paperwork, Association Rio Siete joined the national-level movement organization CNC-EA. The CNC-EA is a leading national-level movement organization with institutional ties to the state. While CNC-EA's ability to change the outcome of Rio Siete is limited, the relationship between the local association and national-movement organization is mutually beneficial. The local association gains a support system that guides them through bureaucratic processes and also brings them into a national movement network. The CNC-EA has mechanisms in place to train local organizations and provide them with tools to resolve internal organizational tensions and with opportunities to travel to international conferences and network with movement leaders. The CNC-EA also benefits from the relationship by expanding the scope of their issues and gaining new members on the southern coast and enables them to bridge ethnic and class-based grievances. The CNC-EA can leverage this local representation for national mobilization and for their political agenda.

The associations have many hopes for the guadua plantations, mainly to diversify production to provide more work opportunities for members and their families, and prioritizing women. The production on the plantations, whether it continues with guadua or not, will have to meet the state's requirements that it generate enough revenue to pay the state for the land. As the competing values for land escalate, the opportunities for Association Rio Siete to meet the monthly payments become unattainable. Ultimately, the mixed outcomes of land redistribution in Ecuador calls into question the social value of land.

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CHAPTER TWO
EXPORTING HOPE:
LAND, BANANA CONTRACTS, AND THE PROMISE OF PROSPERITY

Introduction

The Ecuadorian banana is a global household staple. In 2020, Ecuador exported over 7 million tons of bananas to the European Union (E.U.), Russia, China, the United States (U. S.), and Japan – nearly double the tonnage of exports from the Philippines, the second major banana exporter (ProEcuador, 2021). Over seventy percent of bananas for export are sourced from small and medium sized producers (Cluster Bananero, 2021). Contracting is the prevalent form of sourcing bananas for exports whereby producers supply a set number of bananas to buyers or exporters on a daily or weekly basis. Under Ecuador’s Banana Law, exporters must register the banana contract with the UniBanano registry online. The banana contract must guarantee a minimum price for the box of bananas for the producer and include state provisions that protect both the producer and buyer. The inability to secure a viable banana contract means that producers are unable to provide stable work opportunities, ultimately contributing to labor precarity. The situation is even more dire for banana producers Association La Chaguana and Association La Guayas – comprised of former plantation workers turned into landowners - who struggle to secure banana contracts to pay back the state for the land and the wages of their workers.

I use political ecology framework to analyze the banana contract and the producer-exporter relationship in Ecuador’s banana industry. Specifically, I analyze the contractual arrangement between the national exporter GinaFruit and the associations La Guayas and La Chaguana, two beneficiaries of the state’s Plan Tierras land redistribution program (see below). The members of the associations were former banana plantation workers that organized themselves in 2012 and applied to Plan Tierras for the redistribution of the military’s banana plantation. In 2015, the two associations successfully gained ownership of the banana plantations.

I argue the members of La Guayas and La Chaguana seek contracts with exporters that provide economic security, despite the technical oversight from exporters. GinaFruit seeks contracts with small producers because they can directly oversee and intervene in assuring the quality of the bananas on the plantation. While the banana contract benefits both the producers and exporters differentially, they are both dependent on one another. To the associations and GinaFruit, the banana embodies prosperity and economic development. However, unstable banana contracts, which refers to an exporters inability to adhere to the contract and pay for the bananas, pushes the associations to compromise between making payments on the land or paying for plantation workers. This instability experienced by small and medium sized producers underscores the limits to land redistribution and highlights the broader ramifications of how banana contracts can shape flexible work contracts and labor precarity on Ecuador's southern coast.

The article is divided into five sections. I first explain why I use a political ecology framework for the study of contract farming and banana contracts. I then provide context for Ecuador's banana industry and the Plan Tierras land redistribution program and discuss my methodology and data collection. In the third section, I provide an overview of banana contracts in Latin America and discuss how the state's mandate to register the contract indirectly shapes the contractual relationship between producers and exporters. In the fourth section, I explain why associations adhere to the contract, attentive to members' relationship to land and the material changes on the hacienda and their livelihoods. Using my interviews with GinaFruit, I detail why the company seeks contracts with small and medium producers and why their motto "we export the hope of a country" represents the prosperity that is often imbued in producing and exporting the banana. I end the article with discussing how the instability of the banana contract jeopardizes the associations' ability to make payments on the land and consequently, contributes to labor precarity in the region.

The Political Ecology of Banana Contracts

The Plan Tierras land redistribution project (2010-2014) in Ecuador was part of a broader wave of state-led land titling, land redistribution, and land legalization policy efforts in Latin America (Landivar Garcia et al. 2013; McKay et al. 2014; Felicien et al., 2018). Governments adopted food security and food sovereignty legislation as a response to the food crisis and food riots of 2008-2009 and social movement pressure. At the

same time, governments encouraged foreign land investments, large-scale land deals, and long-term land leases that led to the expansion of commercial farms and plantations for flex crops, including crops used for renewable energy such as soy, sugarcane, and oil palm (Borras et al, 2012). The global rush for land and state-led land titling and land legalization efforts turned land into resource frontiers for capitalist expansion where land and the resources on those lands may be commodified (Kelly and Peluso, 2015). The land grabs for banana cultivation have intensified land conflicts, dispossessed smallholders from their land, and exploited internally displaced persons with low wages and no social benefits in Myanmar (Hayward et al, 2020). In Laos, Chinese investors acquired long-term land leases for small-scale banana production that rapidly changed the landscape and contributed to degradation and chemical pollution (Friis and Nielsen, 2016). In the case of Ecuador, I use a political ecology framework to analyze how land rights and banana contracts intertwine to shape rural livelihoods. I argue the banana contract determines the associations' ability to pay back the state for the land transfer. The contract, while dictating the conditions for production, also shapes work opportunities. Thus, when exporters fail to fulfill the contract and pay the associations for the bananas, the workers are directly affected.

I use a political ecology framework to analyze why the associations adhere to the contract despite the uneven relationship and the risks embodied in production. Political ecology is a framework that examines the logics of capitalism and environmental outcomes and the contestation over resource access and control (Peet and Watts, 2004). By focusing on the associations and their new land rights, I offer a close analysis of the meanings ascribed to the contract and to the materiality of owning land and producing bananas; and I describe how unstable banana contracts challenge the association's ability to pay for the land and to provide work opportunities. This analysis of contracts contributes to a rich field of study that analyses the political economy and ecological dimensions of contracts and contract farming. In a political economy perspective, the contract is an uneven relationship between producer and buyer, whereby the buyer expropriates the means of production and shapes production and labor decisions, control inputs, and relegate risks to the growers (Watts, 1994). In this view, the producer's control is legal but illusory, and the contract thus reflects the company's representation of what the producer's daily practice should be but does not necessarily reflect

the day-to-day practice of contract farming (Clapp, 1994). A political ecology framework reveals that producers tied to the contract intensify the use of agrochemicals to meet quality standards and market demands, compromising the health of workers and the environment in the process (Grossman, 1998). Contracts and contractual arrangements can place the burden of the spread of biological risks to producers (Philippines, de la Cruz and Jansen, 2018). As such, contract growers face a problem of competing biopolitical exigencies. They make life or death decisions between mitigation efforts that can protect neighboring farms more than the farmworkers themselves (Guthman, 2017).

I trace the banana contracting system in Ecuador and Latin America to the multi-national corporations, Chiquita, Dole, and Del Monte. These companies relied on a racialized and gendered work force and the clearing of large tracts of forests for banana plantations, rail roads, townships, and port infrastructure in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean (See Soluri, 2005; Colby, 2011). Contracting, as I later describe, emerged as a response to the regulation of foreign owned land, labor unrest, and the wide-spread agrarian reforms of the 1950s-1970s. An anti-trust law suit against the United Fruit Company in the 1950s also forced the company to dis-invest from Latin America and sell their plantations. The contract in Ecuador emerged as an agreement between banana producers or merchants and a shipping company and later developed into a contractual arrangement between producers and exporters whereby exporters such as the Standard Fruit Company had complete control over the inputs and technology used on the plantation. Contracts are now regulated by the state and only until recently, is there an attempt to enforce compliance in the contract. My analysis of the banana contract – from the meanings producers and exporters ascribed to the contract to the materiality of contracts – points to both the limitations in land redistribution and the opportunities for addressing labor precarity in the banana industry.

Context and Methodology

Banana exports generated 3.66 million dollars in 2020 (ProEcuador, 2021) and represent 2% of GDP and 35% of agricultural GDP (Ministerio de Comercio Exterior, 2017). In 2020, Ecuador exported 7 million tons of bananas to the E.U. (25%), Russia (20.4%), the Middle East (13%), the U.S. (13%), the Southern Cone

(7%), and to Asia (7%) (ProEcuador, 2021). In 1964, eight companies controlled ninety percent of the export market (Larrea Maldonado, 1987). In contrast, in 2020, the top six companies exported nearly a third of bananas and over one hundred companies exported the rest (Acrobanec, 2019). There are 548 large-scale producers (above 100 ha), 1,564 medium-sized producers (30-100 ha), and 4,792 small-sized producers (under 30 ha) totaling to 6,904 producers (ProEcuador, 2021). About 162,236 hectares of land are under banana production, concentrated on Ecuador's coast from the north to the south; with large-scale producers in the Guayas and Los Rios provinces, and smaller and medium-sized producers in the province of El Oro (Ministerio de Comercio Exterior, 2017). These producers are a mix of companies, individuals, family-owned farms, cooperatives, and agricultural associations.

The Plan Tierras project began as Plan Haciendas in 2009 as part of President Rafael Correa's (2006-2017) government mandate for an "agrarian revolution." The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock developed Plan Haciendas as a pilot project focused on the redistribution of state lands under a five-year period (Rosero, 2011). Plan Haciendas was quickly replaced by Plan Tierras as a broader effort to redistribute state lands and increase access to land with land titles, including the recognition of indigenous and communal lands. The report by Landivar Garcia et al. (2013) on Plan Tierras' early efforts of redistribution underscore the importance of incorporating the lived experiences of beneficiaries to characterize the successes and failures of the project. In one of their case analyses, the authors argue the beneficiary associations struggled to produce on the land and to then pay back the state for the land, forcing them into debt and food insecurity. In another case, waiting for the redistribution of land brought outside individuals to the land to lay claims to it, complicating the process of redistribution, and often resulting in violence and displacement. My case study analysis of the redistribution of the military's banana plantations to the former banana plantation workers adds to this complexity. Initially, while the former workers struggled with managing the banana plantations, they eventually secured a banana contract with a large exporter that gave them the hope and motivation to continue with improving the quality and quantity of the banana. As I later show, the banana contract provides economic security to the producers. Unfortunately, this was curtailed with COVID-19 – further complicating

what already is a co-dependent and unequal relationship that undermines the ability of small and medium-sized producers to provide stable work opportunities and as a result, that contributes to labor precarity.

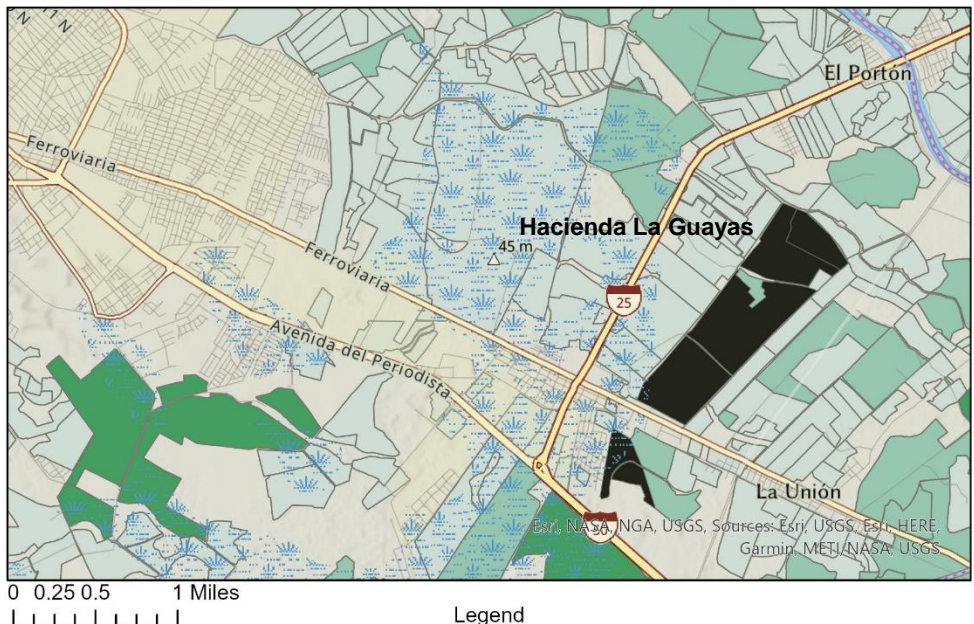
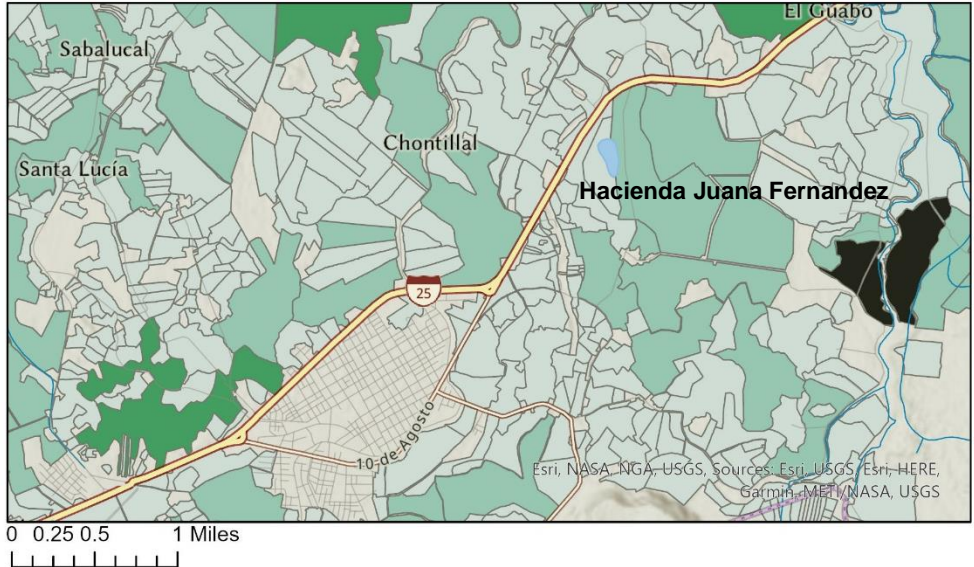
The members of the associations are the former banana plantation workers of the military's now defunct company, Hdineagros. The company Hdineagros operated between 2006-2012, employed over 300 workers, and held several contracts with exporters. They sold between 9,400 to 14,000 boxes a week in 2008. In 2012, the inter-institutional agreement (No. 749) ordered the Ministry of National Defense to transfer land from HoldingDine and Hdineagros to the Ministry of Agriculture to contribute to the Plan Tierras land redistribution project. The workers of Hdineagros organized into five associations to apply to Plan Tierras, with four of the associations successfully obtaining land titles to the military's banana plantations between 2014-2015. As new landowners, the associations must continue with banana production to generate revenue that can support the wages of the workers and repay the state for the land. The associations are required to make these land payments within a ten-year period.

The analysis for this article is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2018-2019 in Ecuador. I traveled between the two associations La Chaguana and La Guayas in El Oro to learn about their history and their transition from working on the banana plantations to owning the plantations. Association "La Chaguana" has 33 members and owns and manages Hacienda Juana Fernandez, which has 67 hectares of land under banana production. Association "La Guayas" has 95 members and owns and manages three haciendas: La Guayas, La Central, and La Brigada, totaling 167 hectares of banana production. In 2018, both associations secured banana contracts with GinaFruit and exported their banana to Japan, Turkey, and Europe. In each plantation, I observed working conditions, both in the field and in the packing plant, and I asked members and the workers about their experience with GinaFruit. Additionally, I interviewed GinaFruit staff in their central office and in the field to understand why they seek contractual arrangements with producers such as La Chaguana and La Guayas. By focusing on the contract between the two associations and GinaFruit, I reveal how the associations' social relations to land and the banana influence decisions to pursue and implement the contract, while also encouraging better quality control over the banana and access to broader market opportunities.

Figure 7. shows the location of Haciendas Juana Fernandez and Hacienda La Guayas, and their proximity to the townships and the major roads leading to Puerto Bolivar, the port in El Oro. As the map shows, the plantations are among dozens of small- and medium-sized banana plantations.

Figure 7. Maps of locations of Hacienda La Guayas and Hacienda Juana Fernandez and the neighboring banana plantations.

Location of Hacienda La Guayas and Hacienda Juana Fernandez and small and medium-scale banana producers in El Oro



- Legend**
- Case study locations. (i.e. the military's banana plantations redistributed under Plan Tierras)
 - Small-scale producers (0- 30 ha)
 - Medium-scale producers (30-100 ha)
 - Large-scale producers (100 ≤ ha)

The Banana Contract

Since the mid-19th century, U.S.-based cargo and passenger ships carried small loads of bananas from Ecuador to the U.S. (San Andres, 1961). In late 1921, during the decline of the Ecuadorian cacao trade, the President of Ecuador José Luis Tomayo (1920-1922) commissioned the Colombian-born engineer Jose Cicerón Castillo to analyze the possibility of banana production in Ecuador. In the report and on a map, Castillo (1922) identified a “banana belt” - land available for banana production stretching from the south of Guayaquil to Pasaje, near Machala. He selected this area for the weather, soils, and proximity to the rivers and also because it was downhill from the cordillera and inland from the flooding of the swamps of the coastline. He noted the opportunity to further develop the rail lines along the coast and port infrastructure, and that cacao plantations intermixed with bananas supported both crops against winds and heavy rains. He selected what today is Ecuador’s southern coast and capital of banana production. The report suggests that Castillo contacted the United Fruit Company to discuss Ecuador’s interests in banana production and after a representative’s site visit and meeting with President Tomayo in 1922, the company failed to uphold their agreement to purchase land in Ecuador. In fact, Castillo writes that because the company bailed on the land investment, the President would let him lead a banana company instead that would be headquartered in California and facilitate trade on the west coast. Created in Boston by Minor C. Keith, Andrew Preston, and Lorenzo D. Baker in 1899, the United Fruit Company (UFC) - known today as Chiquita Brands International (Chiquita) - was the leading banana producer and exporter of bananas in the 1920s, with a vertically integrated system of large-scale banana plantations, railroads, and shipping lines throughout Central America (Soluri, 2005). Despite the initial interest in purchasing land in Ecuador in 1922-1923, the political instability and the coup d’état in 1925 warned off the UFC until 1932 when they purchased 100,000 hectares of land on the southern coast - 80,000 of which were eventually donated to the government in 1936 (Striffler, 2002; Southgate and Roberts, 2016).

Ecuador was a minor exporter until 1948. The export of bananas slowly gained traction, with over 10,000 lbs. of bananas exported in 1924 that nearly doubled by 1926 (Ecuador El Comercial, 1927). In 1934, the shipping company Graceline – with shipping ties to Ecuador since 1879 - introduced passenger vessels with

refrigerated compartments for banana bunches; they provided fruit export companies with two-year contracts to export the bananas to New York that ultimately peddled the Ecuadorian banana abroad (San Andres, 1961). After the arrival of UFC, General G. Alberto Enriquez decreed a law (Decreto Supremo No. 162) in 1938 to regulate foreign ownership of land and to promote the growth of independent growers by requiring foreign companies to purchase bananas from national producers. The impact of this decree did little to encourage entrepreneurship at the time, nor did a system of contracting arise as it did in neighboring Colombia (Southgate and Roberts, 2016). By 1936, the UFC had funded and inaugurated the new docking station Berth 147 at the port of Los Angeles with four giant cranes and conveyor belts for unloading bananas, making it the most modern infrastructure for unloading bananas at the time (San Pedro News Pilot, 1936). In the years leading to WWII, tropical fruit production declined in Cuba, Jamaica, and Mexico, creating an opening for Ecuadorian bananas to compete in the market and to supply the U.S. and Europe at a high exchange rate (Southgate and Roberts, 2016). Ecuador thus emerged from WWII to become a top producer and exporter of bananas. President Galo Plaza Lasso (1948-1952), who was the first president to serve a full four-year term since Tamayo, instituted economic reforms and infrastructure projects that favored the banana industry, including the construction of highways and railroads, and he sought and promoted investments in land for banana production (Southgate and Roberts, 2016). Between 1949 and 1950, banana cultivation extended considerably from the Guayas province south to Machala, Pasaje and Santa Rosa with the advantage of the port of Puerto Bolivar nearby. Banana plantations spread north of Guayaquil to Santo Domingo, Quinindé, and Quevedo - along the riverfronts, because the Guayas River was the key mode of transportation for bananas to the port of Guayaquil. In 1948, Ecuador exported 2.6 million bunches, and by the end of 1960, it exported over 24 million bunches (San Andres, 1961).

The banana boom declined towards the mid-1960s as producers were unable to respond to the spread of the sigatoka disease and to transition from the Gros Michel variety to the Cavendish variety at the rate of exports. From the 1950s into the 1960s, there was also a wave of agrarian reforms implemented by both democratic and military dictatorships in Latin America. In 1954, Jacobo Árbenz, president of Guatemala, confiscated about 150,000 hectares that United Fruit kept in reserve, most likely setting off the CIA-backed

coup d'état in that country (Southgate and Roberts, 2016). The Ecuadorian military government (1963 – 1966) passed the *Ley de Tierras Baldías y Colonización* in 1964 that set limits to land ownership, expropriated idle lands, and redistributed land to peasant farmers – with mixed and limited results. The agrarian reform also affected large banana plantations including the United Fruit Company's plantations on the coast. Charvet (1987) writes that in 1954, in the provinces of El Oro, Los Ríos and Guayas, 26% of bananas planted corresponded to properties that were larger than 500 hectares; and that in El Oro specifically, half of the plantations were under the control of four families until the agrarian reform. In 1964, the *Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización* (IERAC, the Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Settlement) developed a plan for the redistribution of UFC's banana enclave Hacienda Tenguel, located southwest of Guayaquil. In practice, IERAC's project was underfunded and poorly managed, dividing Hacienda Tenguel among at least a dozen cooperatives for individual and communal use that in some dire cases, led the new landowners into debt and into contractual arrangements to shift production to bananas to sell to the UFC. The beneficiaries of the agrarian reform ultimately were workers that became peasants only to become workers again under contract (Striffler, 2002). By the end of the 1970s and 1980s, small-scale banana plantations extended throughout the southern coast, and multinational companies instituted long-term contracts with banana producers instead of attempting to establish their own plantations in Ecuador (Charvet, 1987).

The banana contract is a producer-exporter relationship that has roots in the state's early efforts to regulate foreign investments and to promote independent producers – a model that Southgate and Roberts (2016) argue is the distinguishing feature of the Ecuadorian banana industry, differentiating it from UFC's banana republics in Central America and the Caribbean. The inability of multinational companies to own and directly operate land and banana production in Ecuador gave rise to contracting and a multiplicity of national producers and exporters. The UFC initiated a process of divestment in the 1950s in Central America based on antitrust laws in the U.S. and due to labor unrest, forcing the company to leave banana plantations to workers or to the government. In Honduras, the UFC established contracts with banana producing associations in 1954, following labor unrest and Arbenz's takeover of the UFC's plantations in Guatemala

(Clapp, 1994). In Colombia, the company first entered the terrain by establishing contracts with local planters in the early 1900s such that by 1930, close to 80 percent of bananas were sourced from local planters; though this was later interrupted during WWII such that post-war, the locals were able to develop their own banana export business based on the company's rationale (Bucheli, 2004). While the UFC had contracts with former plantations workers in Hacienda Tenguel and with local planters, the Standard Fruit Company was the first company to establish contracts with producers that directly intervened in the production process and controlled all technical aspects of the plantation (Charvet, 1987). By 1985, the Standard Fruit Company (known today as Dole), Noboa Group (a national producer and exporter), Del Monte, and United brands (Chiquita) held long-term contracts (5 years), with a total of 165 properties (7% of the national total) that cultivated bananas on 13,520 hectares of land, representing 23 percent of the total land used for banana production (Charvet, 1987). Contracting is now the prevalent form of sourcing bananas in Ecuador.

Ecuador's Banana Law - *Ley para Estimular y Controlar la Producción y comercialización del Banano, Plátano (Barraganete) y otras Musáceas Afines para Exportación* (Law for the Control and Commercialization of the Banana, Plantain and other Musaceae for Exports) regulates the production and commercialization of bananas for export. The law has undergone several amendments and ratifications since the 1990s law that instituted the contract, including setting limits to the expansion of new banana plantations, and establishing an inter-institutional committee with banana producers and exporters that sets the minimum referential price producers should receive per box. In 2013, an amendment to the Banana Law required the exporter to register their contract with producers on the UniBanano online registry. At a minimum, the contract must include key elements such as the price, quantity of boxes, the box type, and export destinations. An additional document must include the names of all the producers, their addresses, their identification numbers, registry numbers, number of hectares in the plantations, and the scale of production. The contract is a legal agreement between the producer and the buyer for the sale and purchase of bananas and is the government's effort to regulate the price of the banana. The contract standardizes the trade and enables the state to control various aspects of contract farming while not being directly involved in it. For the state, the contract protects the rights of producers and exporters while ensuring minimum standards are met in the commercialization of

the banana. Broadly, the key elements of the contract favor the exporter such that risks are relegated to the producer. The unexpected global phenomenon such as the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 revealed the vulnerability in contract farming and calls into question the safeguards instituted to protect producers and plantation workers.

The contract protects and ensures homogeneity in the banana industry by enforcing the standardization of the box of bananas. The banana box-type refers to the set of characteristics of the banana and the materials used in packaging. The box-type 22XU and the box-type 208 are the most widely exported boxes. The banana bunch is cut in the packing plant contingent on the cluster of bananas needed for the box-type. The box-type 22XU is a “premium” box of bananas exported to the U.S. and Europe that requires a grade (thickness) of a banana to be 39-46 mm and 8 inches in length, and to have 5-12 fingers (bananas) per hand (or cluster). The box must weigh 41-43 lbs. The packaging consists of how the cluster of bananas is placed within the box using a vacuum bag or polypack bag that protects and extends the shelf life of the bananas. Often an ethylene package is placed in the box that also slows down the ripening process.

The contract also ensures a minimum price for the box of bananas. Since the 1980s, the government of Ecuador has set a minimum referential price for bananas as a key measure specifically directed at regulating the banana market (UNEP, 2002). The minimum referential price for bananas is a base for estimating the minimum support price, which is the price that producers should receive per box. The contract must include a clause where the exporter agrees to pay the minimum support price to the producers. The price of the box is based on multiple factors including the cost of labor in production and the marginal utility (profit) for the producers and the exporters. Setting the price of the banana is a responsibility of a committee that meets once a year that includes the large associations of exporters and producers and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG). The price of the box can vary within the same year depending on the high and low seasons of productivity. Since 2013, the average price of the box-type 22XU has remained above US \$6.00 but under US \$7.00. The lower price makes the Ecuadorian banana more competitive. In 2019, when the price increased by 10 cents, Guatemala offered the banana .50 cents cheaper to the E.U., thereby pushing the Ecuadorian bananas out (Acrobanec, 2019).

Not all producers or exporters sign a contract. The spot market is an open market that enables producers such as La Chaguana and La Guayas to sell bananas to multiple buyers/exporters depending on the volume of bananas they have in excess for the day. The spot market is volatile, where the price of the banana can be above the national minimum or significantly lower. During the global pandemic, producers and exporters refused to sign contracts precisely because of the instability in trade relations. For the associations that are beneficiaries of land redistribution, the contract provides a minimum support price for the bananas and ensures they can pay the state back for the land. Without a contract, the associations struggle with making the land payments and with paying the wages of their workers.

Not all producers or exporters uphold the contract. The instability of the banana contract has multiple ramifications. When an exporter fails to meet their end of the contract to buy bananas from the producers, the producers are forced to sell the banana in the spot market more often at a lower price. This also means that producers are unable to provide stable work and income for plantation workers, contributing to labor precarity in the banana industry and region.

In the next section, I detail why the contract matters to the associations. Here I turn to the materiality of production, that is, understanding the economic and cultural meanings ascribed to producing bananas.

The Materiality of Production

Initially, the Association La Chaguana struggled with finding a buyer and a market for their bananas. As land beneficiaries, their income and ability to pay for the land is predicated on finding a secure buyer and exporter for their bananas that pays at least \$6.00 a box. The association must make monthly payments that amount to about \$20-25,000 a year. In ten years, or by 2025, the association would have paid off a credit from the state of \$177,306.62 for the land.

The first contract with the Cooperativa de Producción Bananera “Pajonal” was simple and half a page long, stipulating the association sell their bananas every week for the year of the contract. The association later had a contract with Agrocomercio Jumbri, whereby the buyer would pay for the banana type 22XU or its equivalent at a price minimum of \$3.00. Under this contract, the bananas are exported to Chile.

The contract between La Chaguana and GinaFruit is more detailed. The producer is obligated to sell the banana weekly to the exporter, which is obligated to buy 4,021 boxes of banana 22XU or its equivalent. The contract recognizes there is a variation of production throughout the year because of changes in weather and can accept decreases in production by thirty percent during the low season between May and November. The exporter agrees to pay the minimum support price and a bonus, if possible. The quality of the banana depends on the producer, who is responsible for providing fresh, clean, unripe bananas that are free of blemishes and defects, and are cut and boxed according to market demands. The company provides the material for packaging, including cardboard boxes. The producer is responsible for transporting the material from storage to the hacienda. The contract says the association can use the GinaFruit brand and that of third parties. The eighth clause stipulates the responsibilities of the producers. The contract also invokes national policies that protect both the producer and the buyer.

The uncertainty of buyers upholding their end of the contract makes the associations insecure in the market. This has the ripple effect of lowering the number of days available for work. The first contracts with smaller exporters paid low prices for the banana. The contract with GinaFruit matters to the associations because they respect the price of the box and pay on time, giving the associations a sense of economic security. It took the associations a few years to secure a contract with an exporter like GinaFruit.

When I asked Rodrigo, a member of La Chaguana, about their relationship with GinaFruit, he responded, “GinaFruit? Very good. They are helpful. If there is a problem, an accident or a worker has a problem, we call, and they provide solutions. Even [the owner] Gina visits if necessary.” Xavier, who is also a member of La Chaguana, told me about their prior contracts and low prices. He said, “back when we sold the banana, they [exporters] would pay \$1 or \$2 and that is low. But when you sign a contract for the year, they pay the official price. That is why I tell you we are with this company [GinaFruit] for two years - because they pay well, and they meet the quota, and she [Gina] knows we are very grateful.” Mario similarly agreed and told me GinaFruit pays more for the box of banana and pays on time. In our conversation, he told me “Yes, last year when the box was at \$15 or \$16 and we were selling the box at \$6, we wanted recognition or something more

and they [GinaFruit] told us: if you uphold the contract, I will [Gina] will give you a percentage at the end of the year. And it is true – she gave us some, not much but \$150 for each member.”

The *socios* (association members) appreciate when the company owners visit the haciendas. The workers mentioned the owner Gina because she visits the haciendas and is personable. However, visits from company workers can be problematic. GinaFruit’s subsidiary company GinaQuality have staff overseeing the packing plant. They supervise the loading of the trucks and ensure the containers are secured right before leaving the hacienda. They make sure the workers are following protocol by wearing the appropriate gear and are handling the bananas and boxes in a proper and delicate manner. A *socio* told me, “For the slightest thing, they hassle us, but it’s not everyone. They are a little demanding, but at least they pay.” I also observed *socios* correcting the workers and reminding women not to wear earrings, and telling others to get off their phones. Both the company workers and the members regulate each other and the workers. As we walked in the packing plant, a *socio* told me earrings can fall and get caught in the bunches of bananas and eventually bruise them.

The price of the box matters to the associations and incentivizes their production. When La Chaguana signed their contract with GinaFruit in October 2017, their box was sold at \$8.45, a significant increase above other contracts and the minimum support price for producers. In the first delivery to GinaFruit, the association sold 1,485 boxes at \$8.70 in week 43, totaling a value of \$12,919.00. Other costs are involved in the production and packaging, such as costs covering the cardboard boxes, costs for port transfers, and other administrative costs. For this week, the association owed GinaFruit \$368.08 in other costs. The gains for the association are worth the investment and the commitment to the contract.

A close look into the materiality of producing bananas for the export market explains why the associations seek contracts with exporters like GinaFruit, and why they work collectively towards improving the quality of the banana. While the associations need to secure contracts to pay back the state, they also want the contract to carve out their own market opportunities. To the associations, who were former banana plantation workers, owning land and making decisions about banana production encourages them to pursue contracts with exporters. Through interviews and observations within the plantations, the associations’

attitudes in seeking contracts are exemplified through three overarching and inter-related material changes on the haciendas and their livelihoods: 1) quality and increased production, 2) new infrastructure and improved working conditions, and 3) higher income and enhanced livelihoods.

Quality and Production

When I asked about quality and production, most if not all *socios* and *trabajadores* (workers) told me they directly improved the quality of the banana and increased yields every year. Quality is about disease- and blemish-free, unripe, bananas. The bananas undergo quality checks in the packing plant and when they arrive at their destination. Bananas showing any of these “impurities” are sent back to the exporter. For GinaFruit, meeting quality standards is key to their success, and they aim to work directly with producers to maintain and improve the quality of the banana. La Chaguana exports about 130,000 boxes a year, a number that continues to increase with improved production and market opportunities.

To walk around the plantation, I need a chaperone. To learn how the banana grows required I follow, observe, and listen. The workers showed me how they care for the banana plant, cut down the stalk, and ensure new sprouts are growing around the older stalks. The process of selection - deciding which stalk grows, is part of the process of caring for the bananas. At any given time, there are about four stalks growing. Caring for the banana requires fertilization, removing unnecessary leaves, examining for pests, and ensuring the plant has proper root drainage. Quality is important to the associations, and this is what connects them to a buyer such as GinaFruit. Much of the labor and care for the plantations involves the experience of longtime workers who take pride and ownership in the environmental quality and control of the plantations. This longtime commitment to selecting and harvesting the banana influences the relationship and ownership of both land and the banana.

I talked to two brothers ages 79 and 80 about their experiences in working on the plantations as *socios* and beneficiaries of land. The younger brother is Ramon, and the older brother is Raul. They are from the neighboring province in the highlands, the province of Loja, and migrated to El Oro in the 1950s because they were poor and lived in a rural area that had no access to roads or schools. They experienced the city's

changes and they remember when the railroads would transport them and foodstuffs from Pasaje to Machala. I interviewed them during the lunch break where they both brought their own soup to eat in the dining hall.

Ramon simply put it, “*lo mismo que mi hermano, aquí trabajamos juntos, saca el uno, saca el otro allí nos dividimos*” (the same as my brother, we work together, he takes one out [digs] and I take the other and we split work among us) – they work together. The brothers always faced adversity as they navigated unstable work environments in the banana industry, especially in the 1990s when the Ecuadorian currency was devalued and workers received lower wages. They secured employment in hacienda La Guayas around the year 2009. Raul recalled how former President Rafael Correa supported the land redistribution program which aimed to take land from the rich to give to the poor – a sentiment many expressed in other interviews. Rafael Correa not only gave them land but instituted and mandated the *seguro* – or social benefits that include access to healthcare, which banana workers never had before. When I asked about the quality of production with Hdineagros compared to now under *their* management, they both responded with excitement and shared how essential their work in creating ditches and clearing the canals improves the quality of the banana. Ramon recalls, “we made 1,400 boxes, but after we started making the canals, production improved up to 2,000 or 3,000. Now during the good times, we produce 5,000 boxes in La Bolivar.” Raul followed up and said that production “*Mejóro bastante* (improved significantly). Land without canals cannot produce the same as land with canals.”

They explained to me about the importance of the canals or ditches for the drainage of excess water on the banana plantations. These ditches are about 5ft in length and required I jump from one side to the other. Sometimes there’s a makeshift bridge made of bamboo to help you cross over. The roots of the banana need aerated, moist soil, and the canals provide drainage for excess water. The brothers know every square inch of the banana plantations such that they take pride in their knowledge of the canals and maintaining the drainage system. The workers have a sense of belonging and ownership and contribute to the collective work of maintaining the production of the banana for the collective benefit. Improvements in quality and increased production motivate associations to seek contracts with exporters like GinaFruit, a company that respects the price of the banana box and gives them “hope” in attaining prosperity.

The associations use agrochemicals to control pests and diseases. The threat of the spread of Fusarium Tropical Race Four (TR4), a fungus causing the banana to wilt, is rapidly spreading across banana-producing areas in Asia and in South America. During fieldwork in 2019, I observed how the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock took an active approach to halting the spread of the plant disease by providing lime powder for producers to use on their plantations, disinfecting trucks on the highway and on the border with Peru and Colombia, and held workshops with producer associations about how to prevent the spread of the disease. The associations are working towards reducing their use and dependence on pesticides, insecticides, and fungicides to meet GinaFruit's quality standards, which requires producers to work towards the Global Gap certification, an international certification program that encourages producers to use "good agricultural practices." Environmental certifications and organic production can reduce the risk of exposure for workers and the environment (Melo and Wolf, 2007). La Chaguana and La Guayas follow GinaFruit's quality standards because they also aim to improve their production and quality to carve out their own market opportunities.

Improvements in Infrastructure

The associations made investments in infrastructure as soon as they were able to. Hdineagros stopped caring for the haciendas after learning about the Plan Tierras land redistribution program in 2012. By the time the association gained ownership in 2015, they were left with relics, the company's broken machinery, and low production. With revenues from the sale of bananas, the associations built new and fixed old infrastructure in the packing plants, improving the work conditions for the workers. The associations also improved the kitchen and eating area, where workers can take a break in a comfortable and vented environment. Association La Guayas built lockers in Hacienda La Central that gave workers a place to put their personal belongings and a sense of security, since they leave their backpacks and handbags near the packing plant and their items could otherwise be subject to theft. The association also provided personal protective gear, including gloves, hair nets, and aprons; materials that were seldom provided before under the management of Hdineagros.

The offices are sacred, and workers leave their dirty rubber boots outside the door to make sure the floor remains clean. Workers respect the space and administrators who process the paperwork and payments. I cleaned my boots before entering the offices from the slight mud I picked up from walking in the plantations. The associations take pride in the office because it symbolizes and legitimizes their role as producers. This legitimacy is represented in the building itself, as the location where the administrators and members gather to make decisions about the banana enterprise. Many of the members who are in leadership positions within the associations are now making important decisions on behalf of the association within these offices.

Marco, a *socio* of La Chaguana, had worked for Hdineagros and told me about the material changes on Hacienda Juana Fernandez and how the association promotes employment opportunities by improving the work conditions and quality of the bananas.

During the time of Hdineagros, the plantations were not like they are now. As you see, our beautiful [banana] plants and everything [here] is changing. Everything was different then and what we produced we mostly rejected. There were bad people administering, bad management of the banana plantations. There was not enough work for people like [there is] today. More production means more work available. We do one change and another to improve everything [here] – and because of that, we create new employment for people. We do not only benefit, but everyone does because of our administration, accountant, and secretary. As you see our offices, and everything we are doing - legally. Now, when people retire, they have their social benefits that they rightfully earned.

In the field, the associations installed new water pumps, which greatly enhanced the quality of the banana and increased yields. In Hacienda Juana Fernandez, I was shown how the pump sources water from the local river La Chaguana and how it is distributed via pipes for irrigation. Water is a key element in the production of bananas and the direct source to the river enables the association to irrigate their plantations. The material changes on the haciendas and the improvement in the quality and production of bananas encourages associations to continue to seek and adhere to contracts with exporters such as GinaFruit. The members of the association told me they see the fruit of their labor in the material changes on the hacienda.

Increased Incomes and Enhanced Livelihoods

Securing a contract and buyer that pays on time means the associations can support the incomes of the *socios* and *trabajadores*. The *socios*' income nearly doubled under their own management. The members earn

income from their shared earnings and from working on the plantation. A *socio* that worked for Hdineagros told me that before, he would earn US \$15 a day, and now he earns \$25 depending on the number of boxes. The income of women working in the plantations is lower and ranges from \$17 – 20 dollars a day. Most women working for the associations said they worked at least once a week and rotate among other haciendas during the week to generate more income. Women are more likely to talk about their income by what they make a day, while men were more likely to tell me about their monthly salary. Women throughout the associations earned less money than men as both a *socia* and as a *trabajadora*. Despite the gender and pay disparity between *socios* and *trabajadores*, everyone interviewed reported higher incomes than before.

The inclusion of women in the membership of the associations was part of the requirement of the Plan Tierras redistribution program. The gender quota requires that women make up thirty percent of the membership of the agricultural association. Both associations meet the gender quota and hire women to work on the plantations. Today, most women hired by the associations are the wives or partners of the male *socios* and *trabajadores*. The increased income for the *socios* and their wives means they can buy material things and improve their livelihoods. Many *socios* shared with me that the improved income from the contract with GinaFruit allowed them to buy their own home or to purchase a motorcycle. Elsewhere (Chapter Three) I argue that the gendered disparities in the banana sector limit women's opportunities to work more than a day at the plantation. Unstable banana contracts have gendered effects and are more likely to push women to labor precarity. I found women are underpaid, and that they navigate labor precarity by rotating among different banana plantations or by generating income selling food on the weekends.

The benefits of the contract can obscure the labor dynamics on the plantations that contribute to labor precarity in the broader region and sector. Under Rafael Correa's government, the outsourcing of work contracts in the banana sector was abolished, and all workers were required to register employees in the social security program. However, fear of retaliation from landowners thwarts opportunities for union organizing (IEE and ASOMAC, 2019). The inability for a worker to secure a "work contract" with a banana producer contributes to labor precarity in the sector (Martinez Valle, 2004). In this case, the scale of production limits the hiring of workers. That is, small- and medium-sized producers struggle with securing contracts. The

contract matters to the associations because they can secure work opportunities for their permanent temporary work force. Without a contract, the associations hire workers ad hoc depending on the buyers they find in the spot market. In the spot market, the volume and price fluctuate, and the number of workers needed to harvest and package the banana can vary. Unstable or unreliable banana contracts on one plantation means that workers seek work opportunities on other plantations. In my interviews with workers, they preferred working for the associations because of the better working conditions and pay. Much of this was also possible because of the contract.

GinaFruit and Exporting Hope

GinaFruit entered the banana market in the early 2000s when the national market opened favorably to new exporters. GinaFruit was ranked within the top twenty exporters in 2020 with a 1.48% share of the export market, a slight decline from 2019 (Acorbanec, 2019). GinaFruit's offices are in the building called The Point on the Santa Ana waterfront, one of the tallest buildings in Guayaquil, and known colloquially as *El tornillo* – or “the screw” - because of its spiral design. The building opened in 2013, and it hosts other banana exporters. The offices overlook the city and the union of the Duale River, the Babahoyo River, and the Guayas River. You can see the traffic on the bridge from Guayaquil to Duran, and the new pillars of the Aerovia cable car traverse both cities. The building overshadows Santa Ana Hill and the historic Las Peñas neighborhood. *El tornillo*, along with the new condominiums, is part of the revitalization of the Santa Ana waterfront and of the city's modernization plan to attract business.

After leaving my Ecuadorian *cedula* (identification) on the first floor in exchange for a visitor pass, I met with MJ who is the director of commercialization and responsible for marketing. She tells me about the company's history and how GinaFruit is a family-owned business. The company owners, Hugo Alfredo Castro and Gina Aerial de Castro, who are married, established their first contract with Japan in the early 2000s. They started with one container and now manage between eight to ten containers a week. They own 500 hectares of land for production and have contracts with at least 15 producers in the provinces of Guayas, El Rio, and El Oro. GinaFruit exports about 180,000 boxes a week to Japan, Korea, China, Singapore, Russia, Germany, Poland, Argentina, and Chile. They also sell bananas in the spot market, which are markets with no

contracts that are often unstable. Geopolitics often shape purchasing power, and the spot market allows for the flexibility to respond. GinaFruit sells bananas in the spot market to Holland, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey.

The drive from Guayaquil to the banana plantations is down *la ruta de la costa* (the coastal highway), the major road leading to the southern coast. This road transverses banana plantations east and west, cutting through towns such as Tenguel, Camilo Ponce Enrique, and El Guabo. Several GinaFruit billboards line this road; they say “*Exportamos la esperanza del País*” – which the company translates to “We export the hope of a country.” Ginafruit uses the banana as a vehicle for economic development, and the company is dedicated to selling quality and to elevating the importance of the banana in the national economy and globally. The company created the subsidiary GinaQuality to control the quality and certification of the bananas and other products; and it requires that producers meet the Global Gap certification, an international certification program that encourages producers to use “good agricultural practices” on the plantation, including minimizing the risk of exposure to agrochemicals and maintaining quality control. The company prides itself on establishing a direct relationship with producers to ensure quality. For GinaFruit, quality is what distinguishes them from large producers and competitors.

The proximity of the plantations - from the central offices in Guayaquil to the southern coast - facilitates the oversight of production. The company staff visit the plantations every two or three weeks to inspect the banana plantations and the packing process. They walk around the hacienda, analyze what can improve, and help with supplying fertilizers or other inputs. The visits also make the owners more familiar to the *socios*. Both Associations La Guayas and La Chaguana follow GinaFruit’s protocols because they trust the company is going to continue to buy their bananas and pay on time, and possibly to pay higher prices.

The slogan, “We export the hope of a country” exemplifies how bananas are a national symbol that is embedded in the economy and the social-ecological landscape, as well as part of the everyday lived experience on the southern coast. The contractual arrangement between GinaFruit and the La Chaguana and La Guayas associations is part of the company’s mission to bring economic development to Ecuador. The company is concerned with maintaining quality so as to out-compete other companies. When discussing the quality

concerns of producers, MJ told me, “When they win, we win. When they get better quality, [clients] purchase more bananas from us. That’s our purpose as producers and exporters.” GinaFruit can oversee the plantation because of the contractual arrangement with the association. GinaFruit’s subsidiary GinaQuality has the mechanisms in place to ensure the associations follow company protocols – tracking quality control from the plantation to the client’s port destination.

The banana holds the promise of prosperity for producers and exporters. For the associations, adhering to the contract is necessary, despite the company’s oversight and involvement in the production and packing process. The workers see the fruit of their labor - the materiality of producing bananas – and the material benefits of selling the banana, and they want to continue to carve out their own market opportunities in the global banana trade. GinaFruit, like the associations, is concerned with improving quality to continue to pursue their own market interests abroad. The company uses the legacy of the banana and the contribution to the national economy to justify why they source from small-scale banana plantations. Meanwhile, banana workers are dependent on the stability of the banana contract. As I mentioned earlier, the contract provides security to the associations because they have a guaranteed buyer and price. Without a contract, associations might hire temporary workers ad hoc, which can also lead to lower wages for women. This might not be unique to the case of La Chaguana and La Guayas but rather indicative of the broader dependent relationship between producers and exporters.

Conclusion: Life Beyond the Banana Contract

Ecuador is the world’s leading exporter of bananas. Contracting is the prevalent form of sourcing bananas and over 70 percent are sourced from small- and medium-scale banana producers. In this article, I use a political ecology framework and ethnography to analyze the contractual relationship between two producer associations La Chaguana and La Guayas and the national exporter GinaFruit. The members of the associations are former banana plantation workers that obtained land rights to the military’s banana plantations in 2015 through the state’s Plan Tierras land redistribution program. I argue the banana contract determines whether producers can pay back the state for the land. In spite of company oversight in monitoring the plantations and the risks embodied in producing bananas, La Chaguana and La Guayas seek

contracts with large exporters because they provide economic security and a pathway towards greater market opportunities. However, as the COVID-19 global pandemic unveiled, banana contracts can be unstable and have dire ramifications for workers, especially for women working in the packing plants.

The study of the banana contract reveals that the Ecuadorian state dictates the terms of engagement for both producers and exporters by requiring the registration of the contract, and by setting the quality standards and adjusting the yearly minimum price for the box of bananas. For the state, the contract protects the rights of producers and exporters while ensuring minimum standards are met in the commercialization of the banana. In practice, the state creates the conditions for producers and exporters to depend on one another.

For a national exporter like GinaFruit, the contract allows them to oversee production and to enforce quality control on the plantation. The company motto of “exporting the hope of a country” reflects how the banana holds promises of prosperity for the producer, the exporter, and the nation. In 2021, during the global pandemic, GinaFruit failed to uphold their end of the contract, forcing the association La Chaguana to scramble and to undersell their banana in the spot market. Without a contract, the associations feel vulnerable and insecure and are unable to hire their workers. Unstable contract means workers must find employment on other plantations, ultimately contributing to flexible work contracts and labor precarity.

Despite the risk embodied in producing bananas – from agrochemical exposure on the plantation to low banana prices – the rural associations seek contracts with large exporters because they provide a sense of economic security. Through ethnography and interviews, I found that both the producers and exporters use the banana as a vehicle for economic development. The materiality of producing bananas incentivizes the *socios* to continue to reinvest their labor and resources on the plantations, despite the challenges in securing a viable contract with companies that pay and respect the official price of the banana. This materiality is also evidenced in the improvements in the haciendas, better work conditions, and the higher incomes that enhanced the livelihoods of the *socios*, their families, and the local community. The associations are motivated to improve the quality of production because they own the land and have a longstanding relationship with working on the banana plantations. This relationship to land and the banana reflects how important the

banana is to the local economy and to the social-ecological landscape. The banana has a deep history and hold on the land.

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CHAPTER THREE
“OUR WORK IS NEVER DONE”:
WOMEN, LAND RIGHTS, AND LABOR FLEXIBILITY

Introduction

Maria Alejandra generates income to support her family by removing bananas from the stalk for Hacienda La Pagua, by cooking and selling meat on a stick on the weekends, or by traveling south from Ponce Enrique to Santa Rosa with her cousin to work on the shrimp farms. Maria Alejandra is like many other women working on the banana plantations in Ecuador that hold multiple jobs as a response to labor precarity in the banana industry. Women represent, on average, less than a fifth of the global workforce in the banana export industry, with the highest participation of women being in the Caribbean, where nearly half of banana farms are owned by women (WBF-FAO, 2015). In Ecuador, the world’s leading exporter of bananas, men work in the fields and harvest the banana, and women are in the packing plant where they select, wash, add the brand sticker to the banana, and place them into cardboard boxes for shipment. This gendered division of labor on the plantation is prevalent in Latin America, where women work in the packing plant and are seldom landowners of banana plantations.

Maria Alejandra found her work in Hacienda La Pagua through her partner who is a member of the agricultural association “Association La Pagua” and a beneficiary of the state’s Plan Tierras land redistribution program. Hacienda La Pagua encompasses 56 hectares of land and is considered a medium-scale banana producing plantation. In 2015, under the Plan Tierras, or the Land Project, the state redistributed Hacienda La Pagua to the 19 members of Association La Pagua. Hacienda La Pagua along with seven other haciendas were formerly managed by the now liquidated military company Hdineagros. During the formation of the association, the former workers of Hdineagros, mostly men, invited their wives and sisters to join the association to meet the program’s gender quota that requires thirty percent of the membership are women. Women are often excluded from directly benefiting from agricultural associations and cooperatives because they lack control of land and power in decision-making processes (Deere and Leon, 2001; FAO, 2015; Deere,

2017). Gender quotas are a step towards advancing gender parity in associative production by naming women as direct beneficiaries of land. However, bureaucratic gender quotas mask the complexities on the ground. A gender quota ensures that women have a “right to property,” but it does not ensure “the ability to benefit” from new property relations (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). I argue women’s ability to benefit from new land rights - that is, women’s ability to work on the land and generate income, is limited by the gendered division of labor on the plantation that places women in the packing plant and men in the field. Women who work for the associations are also affected by the gendered division of labor and often work in more than one plantation to generate income.

I use feminist political ecology as a conceptual framework and a photovoice project held with women banana workers to examine the impact of the Plan Tierras gender quota in the context of Ecuador’s banana industry. Between 2018-2019, I interviewed the former workers of the company Hdineagros that organized into five agricultural associations to apply to the Plan Tierras land redistribution program (including La Pagua). Four of the associations successfully gained their provisional land title in 2015 and produce bananas for export. I argue the Plan Tierra’s redistribution of land and bananas to the agricultural associations generated a twofold process. The gender quota set for the rural associations enhanced women’s ownership of land, increased the number of women working on the plantations, and ensured higher incomes. The quota also empowered women by giving them leadership roles within the association and decision-making power over the plantation. However, the gendered division of labor on the plantation limits women’s work to the packing plant where work hours are dependent on the scale of production and the ability of the producer to secure a contract to export the banana. This means that small and medium-scale banana producers often hire women to work once or twice a week to package the banana. The limited work opportunities were observed for both women beneficiaries of land and women working for the smaller plantations. In effect, women respond to labor precarity in the banana industry by rotating among multiple haciendas, shrimp farms, or by selling food on the weekends to earn additional income.

This article is divided into five parts. In part one, I explain why I use feminist political ecology to study the gendered impacts of land redistribution. In part two, I detail the context and methodology, as well as how

and why I implemented the photovoice project with women banana workers on the southern coast of Ecuador. In part three, I discuss the gendered disparities in the banana industry. In part four, I describe how women navigate new land rights and associative life. In part five, I use photographs from the photovoice project to emphasize the multiple ways women earn income and contribute to household social reproduction and to unpaid labor to the associations. I conclude the article by emphasizing how women's work is never done, "*nunca termina nuestro trabajo*," ("our work is never done"), a common phrase that was uttered at a workshop held among the women banana workers; it encapsulates how women feel about social reproduction and about navigating labor precarity in the banana industry.

Feminist Approaches in an Agrarian Context

In the Latin America, progressive governments of Brazil (1988), Venezuela (1999), Ecuador (2008), and Bolivia (2009), instituted a mix of policies that formalized women's land rights, including land policies that name women in joint titling of land, or prioritize female head-of-households as beneficiaries regardless of their marital status (Deere, 2017). In Ecuador, the 2016 Land and Territory Law prioritizes female head-of-households for the redistribution of land (Article 15) and provides financial support to women who form part of associations, the *economía popular y solidaria* (popular and solidarity economy), and *agricultura campesina familiar* (peasant family farming) (Article 34). Concretely, the implementation of Plan Tierras' gender quota is a direct mechanism that enhances women's participation in landownership and associative production. A gender quota in a membership-based organization can have positive impacts in ensuring women's voices are heard in decision-making processes that directly benefit their economic wellbeing (IFAD, 2015).

Feminist political ecology is a conceptual framework that examines the relationship between gender, the environment, and development and centers gender in relation to access and control of resources (Elmhirst, 2015). I follow Mollet and Faria (2013) who argue for a post-colonial intersectional analysis in feminist political ecology that recognizes "the way patriarchy and racialized processes (including whiteness) are consistently bound up in national and international development practice." In this view, patriarchy is constituted in and through racial power and racialization is articulated in and through the environment. I use

feminist political ecology to unpack the gendered disparities in the banana industry by tracing the gendered and racial ideologies and practices that shaped production of bananas in Ecuador and Latin America. This means I trace these gendered relations in the household and on the plantation. As I later argue, the gendered household dynamics – women’s contribution to social reproduction – is integral to how both men and women respond differently to labor precarity in the banana industry. I use social reproduction in a broad sense in a rural context to encompass biological reproduction, including: sustaining intergenerational kin, the contribution of unpaid family labor to support the household and community, with activities such as care work, cooking, and working on the farmland (Chung, 2017; Faxon, 2020).

The feminization of agriculture refers to a period between the 1970s-1990s when out-migration of men from rural areas in Latin America left women behind and available to work for multi-national companies. Women were hired for the processing, selecting, and the packing of flowers, non-traditional fresh fruits, and vegetables for agro-export industries. Women were considered for their flexibility and their ability to master all positions and tasks within the processing and packing station (Lara Flores, 1995). Racialized and gendered ideologies shape decisions about why women are best suited due to their “delicate hands” and “nimble fingers” (Barndt, 2008). In Ecuador’s banana industry, labor flexibility refers to the multiple flexibilities workers embody and perform in banana production, including the flexibility in work contracts (or lack of), the change in wage and salary based on market demands, flexibility in workdays, and functional flexibility such as the ability for the worker to be skilled in all tasks (Vitali, 2016). Labor flexibility is linked to labor precarity and is characterized by the inability of large-scale producers to offer job security and social benefits and the availability of surplus labor resulting from underemployment in the cities (Martinez Valle, 2004). Banana workers are unable to unionize, which means their work is never secured and they must seek opportunities for work in the neighboring plantations (Vitali et al., 2019). Applying a feminist lens to labor flexibility reveals the different ways men and women navigate labor precarity in the banana industry. I argue that because men work in the fields and women work in the packing plant, women often have fewer work hours and earnings and work on other plantations throughout the week. Their work is dependent on the scale of production and the ability of the association to secure a contract with an exporter or buyer. I argue that

women invoke their flexibility as a result of labor precarity in the banana industry such that they perform household chores and farm labor, work at the banana plantations, sell food at festivals, harvest cacao, and package shrimp at the shrimp farms to earn enough income.

Photovoice is a justice-oriented research approach that empowers marginalized communities. In a photovoice project, researchers and community partners use cameras (film cameras, digital cameras, video cameras, smart phones, tablets, etc.) to photograph and document their worlds (Harper, 2020). Used in critical development studies, photovoice combined with a feminist lens reveals how land rights and social reproduction are intertwined and how land serves as the material and cultural basis for securing a “meaningful life” (Faxon, 2020). I implemented a photovoice project with the women banana workers as a method to capture labor flexibility on the southern coast of Ecuador. The photographs help explain why social reproduction is integral to how women respond to labor precarity in the banana industry. In doing so, this article contributes to on-going discussions among feminist scholars and activists in Ecuador that argue for feminist, intersectional, and decolonial approaches in the study of extractive industries and contestation over land and natural resources (Zaragocin, 2019). Such an approach is relational in understanding how resource extraction affects women’s bodies and resources across scale and space, and how women and communities resist large-scale extractive projects (Caretta et al., 2020). In the next section I explain why the use of single-use film-cameras was the right methodological tool to elucidate the in-depth gendered effects of land redistribution and labor flexibility.

Context and Methodology

Between 2010 – 2019, Plan Tierras redistributed over twenty-five thousand hectares of state lands to eighty-five social organizations totaling 5,335 individuals, including 1,982 (37%) women and 3,353 men (63%) (MAG, 2018). Only 37 of the 85 organizations meet the gender quota. Women make up more than half of the membership in only seventeen organizations. Only one organization is documented to have one-hundred percent women’s membership, an organization in Cotopaxi dedicated to *hileria*, or the herding of sheep for thread and textiles. While this data is not comprehensive of the entirety of Plan Tierras, the disaggregation of

this data by gender and the naming of women as direct beneficiaries is a step forward in addressing gender disparities in land ownership in Ecuador.

In 2014, the Ministry of National Defense transferred their banana plantations to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) for redistribution through the Plan Tierras program. Over three hundred workers of the military company Hdineagros, who managed the military’s banana plantations, organized themselves into five agricultural associations to apply to Plan Tierras. The four banana-producing associations - Association La Chaguana, Association La Guayas, Association La Sabana, and Association La Pagua – are in El Oro province, whereas members of Association Rio Siete, who produce the guadua bamboo on Hacienda Rio Siete, are located further north where the borders of the El Oro, Guayas, and Azuay provinces meet. The four banana producing associations successfully obtained their provisional land title to the military’s banana plantations in 2015. As of 2021, Association Rio Siete was still waiting for their provisional land title. During the formation of the associations, the former plantations workers of Hdineagros invited their wives, partners, and sisters to join to meet the gender quota. Only three of the five associations meet the gender quota (See Table 3).

Table 3. Background information for the five associations

Association	Membership			Hacienda	Land (Ha)
	Men	Women	Total		
Asociación Agropecuaria “Chaguana”	23	10	33	Juana Fernández	67
Asociación Agropecuaria “La Pagua”	13	6	19	La Pagua	56
Asociación Agropecuaria “La Sabana”	13	2	15	La Herrera	39
Asociación Agropecuaria “La Guayas”	74	21	95	La Guayas	167
Asociación Agropecuaria “Rio Siete”	23	10	33	Rio Siete	333

Ecuador is the world’s leading exporter of bananas supplying over thirty percent of bananas. In 2020, Ecuador exported 7.2 metric tons of bananas, a 4.17% increase from 2016 (ProEcuador, 2021). Banana exports generated 3.66 million dollars in 2020 (ProEcuador, 2021), representing 2% of GDP and 35% of agricultural GDP (Ministerio de Comercio Exterior, 2017). Over seventy percent of bananas for export are sourced from small and medium sized producers, most plantations located along the southern coast.

For several months between 2018-2019, I traveled from Guayaquil to the province of El Oro to visit the banana plantations and to interview the association's membership and workers. I conducted eighty-seven semi-structured interviews across the associations and interviewed a total of forty women and forty-seven men. The majority of *socios* and *trabajadores* are from the province of El Oro, with a few workers noting that they migrated from the Guayas and Manabi provinces in search for work in the early 2000s. I conducted the interviews in the packing plant (in any available area – out of everyone's way), in the dining hall or in an office space. On one occasion, in a shed near the packing plant, the women stacked cardboard boxes for us to sit comfortably during the interview. The presidents of the associations would often walk me to the packing plant and introduce me to the packing crew leader as a *compañera* of the national-movement organization CNC-EA. The interviews would start with the crew leader picking a worker and then the worker would pick the next person available, like a snowball effect. I made sure to have one-on-one interviews and reduce the possibility of the administrators or other workers overhearing the interview. In my interviews, I asked workers questions about working on the plantations and about the material changes they experienced working under the management of Hdineagros compared to working under the associations. Some women were comfortable to confide in me that they experience sexual harassment, while others would tell me everything was ok. When I asked men about women working beside them, they all said they had no issues with them. Indeed, I wonder if men would admit any issues at all given that I am a woman.

The first interviews with women revealed the hardship of rotating among different plantations and of finding opportunities to generate income. It is within this context that the photovoice project emerged as a tool to elucidate women's flexibility in the labor market. Photography is a tool and method that can help us decode the world around us and reveal the power relations in the global food system (Barndt, 2008). I use a combination of photovoice and photo elicitation to learn about the lived experiences of rural women, using their photographs to demonstrate how women navigate labor precarity and generate income in multiple ways while also contributing to household social reproduction and to unpaid family labor for the associations.

The single-use camera allowed anyone to participate because they are easy to use, affordable, and have a minimal risk of damage. The use of digital cameras or smart phones was not feasible in this project - though

film cameras in Ecuador are hard to come by. In fact, I had to purchase the cameras online via Amazon and had them shipped to Guayaquil. I recruited participants in the project by asking the women I interviewed for my dissertation research if they wanted to document their lives with a camera. I asked participants to document their role in the household, at work, and in the association. The participants had the cameras between one to two months. As I told the participants, the limit of 27 frames in the camera helps them focus on the composition and messaging. I provided a basic introduction to using the camera, framing, and lighting. I distributed twenty-eight Fuji film single-time use cameras (with flash, 27 photographs) and ultimately had sixteen cameras returned for processing. I traveled from Guayaquil to Cuenca to develop the film, and I mailed film to Mitomania, an art and cultural center in Quito which is one of a handful of remaining film labs in the country. I purchased a photo scanner to scan the negatives and digitize the images and printed them at a local photo shop in 3 X 5 inch photo paper. I printed a copy for the participant and a copy for the workshop, keeping a digital version for myself. There are several common issues in using film cameras, from the variability in lighting in taking the photograph to risks in the processing of the film and exposure to light or expired chemicals. Photographs of the packing plant had low lighting making it difficult to decipher the silhouettes while other photographs show chemical stains from the processing of the film. In total, about 270 photographs were used in the workshop.

In November 2019, I convened a workshop in a centrally located hacienda, Hacienda La Guayas, one of the haciendas that belongs to Association La Guayas. The workshop was in the packing plant and gathered over thirty women from across the associations. The participants organized into four groups and I asked them to sort the photographs based on the prompt. I took notes during the small working groups as I asked questions about the photographs. The groups used colored paper and markers to arrange the photographs on a poster board. Once the posters were made, the participants explained the sorting of the photographs to the larger group, making connections to their own experiences in working in the banana sector. At the end of the workshop, the women kept the posters to hang in the administrative offices of the associations to give visibility to women's everyday work. The photographs selected for this article depict the major themes and issues discussed at the workshop, including the multiple responsibilities women have in the household and in

the farmland; and how women are multifaceted and able to perform a range of tasks within the packing plant and yet are undervalued and underappreciated in their skills because of their gender. I use the semi-structured interviews I conducted before the photovoice project and notes from the photovoice workshop to corroborate the experiences shared at the workshop and to describe the photos in this article.

Engendering the Banana

Much has been written about the racialized and gendered social history of the banana trade, often emphasizing how Chiquita International bananas, formerly known as United Fruit Company (UFC), engineered gendered and racial notions of work in the production of bananas in the nineteenth and twentieth century (See Euraque, 2003; Soluri, 2005, Colby, 2011, Frank, 2016). At the turn of the century, the United Fruit Company (UFC) owned and leased throughout Latin America and Caribbean. In Central America, the UFC, relied on racialized labor confined to company-run enclaves that often lead to racial tensions among distinct groups (Colby, 2011). In Honduras, the number of workers doubled by the 1920s, including mixed-raced migrants from the country's interior and West Indian blacks brought by the banana companies from the Caribbean and descendants of the Garifuna who arrived in Honduras in 1797 – the latter group threatening the local elites and mestizaje with their blackness (Euraque, 2003). The company intentionally hired white, Anglo-Saxon men to supervise non-white workers on the plantations and developed the “banana cowboy” imaginary that emphasized American masculinity that can both endure the unruly tropics and tame lazy workers (Martin, 2018).

Companies also promoted the consumption of bananas in gendered ways. The companies developed cookbooks that would teach homemakers how to use and cook the banana such as the 83 recipes listed in the Fruit Dispatch Company's (1926) *From the Tropics to your Table: Eighty-three Tested Bananas Recipes*. The Standard Fruit Company, headquartered in New Orleans, published in 1929 a *Home Made Bananas Recipes* book that has illustrations of white women preparing the banana in the kitchen and serving the banana-based dishes to guest while citing studies that suggest the banana's nutritional value can be equivalent to steak. In the 1940s, there was also a concerted effort between the Hollywood film industry, Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor

Policy, and the UFC to cultivate storylines depicting regional acquiescence and situating Latin America as the ideal place for continual investments for tourism, extraction of natural resources, and agricultural production (Bologna, 2013). The UFC based the character of the Chiquita Banana cartoon on the image of Carmen Miranda, a performer born in Portugal known for portraying Latin American femininity in films and who used a headdress with tropical fruits while she sang. In addition to company sponsored cookbooks and promotional videos, the Chiquita cartoon represented a new marketing strategy that propagated catchy jingles and images about banana consumption and quality that projected the image of the uniformity and fullness of the banana, and that redefined quality (Soluri, 2005).

The United Fruit Company expressed interest in purchasing land in Ecuador in 1922-1923. However, the political instability and the coup d'état in 1925 warned off the company until 1932 when they purchased 100,000 hectares of land on the southern coast - 80,000 of which were eventually donated to the government in 1936 (Striffler, 2002; Southgate and Roberts, 2016). Between 1949 and 1950, banana cultivation extended considerably from the Guayas province south to Machala, Pasaje and Santa Rosa with the advantage of the port of Puerto Bolivar nearby. Banana plantations spread north of Guayaquil to Santo Domingo, Quinindé, and Quevedo - along the riverfronts, because the Guayas River was the key mode of transportation for bananas to the port of Guayaquil. In 1948, Ecuador exported 2.6 million bunches, and by the end of 1960, it exported over 24 million bunches (San Andres, 1961). At one point, UFC's enclave in Tenguel, Ecuador had over 3,000 workers and as an effort to keep the workers docile and tied to the plantation, the company purposely hired married men whose wives could stay at home and persuade their husbands from drinking and missing work (Striffler, 2002).

In the 1960s, the cardboard box dramatically changed the processing and packaging of bananas for export and created work opportunities for women (Soluri, 2005). On-site packaging of the banana and the use of the cardboard boxes protects bananas from blemishes, bruises, and extends their shelf life. Prior to the cardboard box, bananas were typically shipped in bundles and in wooden crates, cut and selected in the U.S. by fruit jobbers. The cardboard box in the *empacadora* (packing plant) dramatically shifted gender labor relations on the plantation and for the banana industry. New forms of labor similarly shifted household

dynamics within and among workers and with the company contracts. In Honduras, by the mid to late 1960s, the United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit company hired women for selecting, weighing, stickering, and packing bananas. Most women found work through kin networks, though most female employees were single mothers. Regardless of their marital status, women working in the packing plant depended on the other women to assist with childcare. Women working on the plantation also challenged levels of autonomy and independence, as single mothers worked alongside men (Soluri, 2005).

The cardboard boxes gained popularity in Ecuador, and the first paper mill and cardboard-making company was created in 1960, the *Industria Cartonera Ecuatoriana* (Ecuadorian Cardboard Company). A company ad from 1961 shows a man carrying a cardboard box with bananas inside, with Ecuador spelled out across the box under an image of a banana bunch. The ad says that Ecuador should follow the steps of other countries where producers are exporting bananas in cardboard boxes, reducing the number of rejected bananas and bruising of the fruit, and creating new jobs such as removing bananas from the stalk and packaging the bananas (San Andres, 1961). By the 1960s, foreign enclaves and large-scale plantations weakened their hold of banana production on the coast, launching the path for small and medium-scale producers and elite landowners (Larrea Maldonado, 1987). The cardboard box opened new opportunities for producers to compete in the global market with the promise of forging new employment and quality control. Today, the putting together and gluing of cardboard boxes is a feminized task often relegated to young women. Women start working in the sector at a young age gluing boxes and over time transition to other positions.

Monica, who works for Association La Chaguana, shared with me that she worked in the banana fields with her uncle at a young age because her parents died. As she recalls,

“The *embarques* (packing plant) paid \$8 years ago, but I was not insured because I was a minor and my job was only to remove the *discos* (thin protective sheets on the banana) and to glue cardboard boxes. I spent more time in the *cartonera*, [the room where cardboard boxes are put together] because I was a minor and when the supervisor would come by, I would go towards the back of the *cartonera* and hide.”

While data is limited, a 2015 report by the World Banana Forum's (WBF) Gender Equity Taskforce found that women banana workers earn considerably less than their male coworkers, are exposed to chemical hazards and sexual harassment, and face gender discrimination that hinders their ability to access childcare, healthcare, education, and training. The report estimates that women make up 12% of the workforce in Ecuador's banana industry. Young women are likely to put together the cardboard boxes in a room nearby while a mix of men and women work in the packing plant and cut the banana off the stalk and wash, select, and place them into the box. Men work in the field but some also work in the packing plant alongside women and help with cutting the bananas off the stalk or packing the bananas in the cardboard boxes and stacking them into the container truck for shipment.

Both men and women experience health disparities on the plantation. Workers in the field and in the packing plant are exposed to pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides that can cause gastrointestinal symptoms and skin and eye irritation and are known carcinogens (Hutter et al. 2021). In the packing plant, workers are exposed to toxins as they unbag the banana bunch, cut the bananas from the stalk and wash them in the water bath. Men work in the field throughout the week and are usually responsible for a *lote* or plot of land on the plantation. They are exposed to agrochemicals in the fields while they fumigate with pesticides or from aerial fumigation. In Ecuador, the use of agrochemicals expanded during the 1990s during efforts to improve productivity and market opportunities (Suárez, 2019). In the township of Tenguel, the former banana heartland of the southern coast, the absence of state and public services such as potable water and health provision contribute to the health disparities among banana workers. Banana workers encounter hazards on the plantations and are exposed to contaminated water systems with toxic runoff from mining projects upstream in the neighboring Azuay province (Almeida, 2020).

Women in Latin America have a longstanding history of unionizing in the banana plantations dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. The *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Tela Railroad Company* (Union of Workers of the Tela Railroad Company - SITRATERCO) is the oldest labor union in Honduras that formed as a product of a major strike in 1952 against the United Fruit Company subsidiary, Tela Railroad Company. Women were limited to working in the packing of the bananas in the 1960s until the structure of SITRATERCO created

base committees on the plantations that provided rank-and-file members leadership opportunities. In the 1970s women were elected to committees and by 1986, women throughout the union pushed for a Women's Committee that would focus on gender equity, empowerment, and education. Working in a unionized plantation benefits women by providing them with higher income, long-term job security, pensions, and healthcare benefits (Frank, 2016). The *bananeras* (women banana workers) movement in Honduras solidified in the 1980s and 1990s, expanding with activists and union organizers from the country traveling to neighboring banana-producing countries to share their experiences via workshops on themes such as gender and labor rights. Despite advancements under Rafael Correa's administration in the abolition of outsourcing work contracts, union organizing in the banana sector in Ecuador is limited due to the lack of institutional support and to worker intimidation for unionizing; or they are simply unable to unionize because of the fear of retribution and losing work – ultimately contributing to labor precarity (Vitali et al., 2019; IEE and ASTAC, 2019). In effect, without unions, men are paid 3 or 4 times more than women who perform the same task (Frank, 2016).

International certifications such as Fairtrade Standards require certified plantations to improve working conditions and protect workers' rights, as well as to push for living wages and to practice environmental stewardship. Fairtrade can have a positive impact on income for banana farmers, improve living standards, food security and wellbeing, and promote gender equality and empowerment for women and girls. Fairtrade International has 198 producer organizations of bananas, with the majority in Latin America and the Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic (54), Colombia (42), Peru (34), and Ecuador (38). Of 28,200 farmers and workers beneficiaries, only 13% are women (Fairtrade, 2021). Women are central to the banana trade in the Caribbean, working in both the field and packing plant and owning nearly half of the banana farms (WBF-FAO, 2015). In the Caribbean, women's ownership of land is often tied to men's outward migration to the city, leaving women in charge of the farm. For women landowners, meeting the environmental standards in Fairtrade is often hindered by men hired for daily labor who use chemical fertilizers and pesticides indiscriminately. In the Windward Islands, banana workers perceived Fairtrade to represent production models in Latin America that fail to recognize the heterogeneity in the landscape of the

islands. As such, Wilson and Jackson (2016) caution that FairTrade can emplace banana farmers in networks that reinforce historical and geographical divides between producers in the (post)colonial world and consumers in the developed world.

In the next section, I detail women's experience of becoming a *socia*, or member of the agricultural associations, and the benefits of land ownership in the banana industry. I then use the photographs from the photovoice project to detail how women who work for the associations respond to labor precarity by working in neighboring haciendas or by selling food on the weekends to earn enough income for the week.

Land and Associative Life

Pilar worked for the *militares* (military) and now is a *socia*, or member of Association La Chaguana. When I asked her about the material changes on the hacienda, she smiled and grinned, “*mmmm ni sabe!*” (You don't even know!). Pilar started working for the military in 2011 through an invitation of a *compañero* (colleague) that is now a member of Association Rio Siete. Like many women, Pilar has worked in several positions throughout the packing plant. Once the banana is harvested and brought from the field to the packing plant, there are a set of tasks that follow to get the banana bunch boxed. Some of the tasks that Pilar learned are that of the *defloradora* (cleans the banana bunch), then a *picadora* (cuts the bananas from the stalk), and a *fumigadora* (pest control) who sprays the bananas. She first earned \$8 to \$12 *fumigando*, a task that now pays \$30 a day. As a *fumigadora* for Hdineagros, she felt exploited because she was exposed to toxic chemicals and was paid significantly less than her coworkers. When we talked in the *comedor* (dining hall), she showed me improvements in the kitchen and the seating area, and new paint on the walls and buildings. They renovated the second floor of the packing station where the boxes are put together. “It's not perfect,” she told me, “But it's a work in progress.”

For Pilar, joining the association was the first instance of participating in a social organization and in collective-decision-making. She was formerly in a leadership role and lead several efforts to improve the working conditions of workers, especially for women. The changes made by the association, such as infrastructural changes in the packing plants, contributed to improving the production and quality of the

banana and opened new work opportunities for the local community. In this section, I detail two key positive outcomes of redistributing land to women. First, increased access to land provided women with opportunities to make decisions about the banana plantations, including improvements in work conditions for both men and women. Second, membership in the associations provides shared earnings, which increases income and enhances livelihoods. However, women's work in the banana plantation is based on the scale of production and contracts for export. The associations with contractual arrangements with large exporters can assure at least three days of work for women in the packing plant, whereas the smaller producers, such as La Sabana can only guarantee one day of work for women. Despite the limitations, the *socias*, women members of the associations, attend the meetings and contribute to the decision-making processes.

Women participate in meetings where their vote counts in the management of the hacienda. Decisions within the associations are based on a majority rule. Women in the associations benefit first-hand from their participation in decision-making processes. New bathrooms and lockers, for example, are infrastructural changes that responds to the worker's needs, especially for women. Delfina, a member of Association La Guayas, took a picture of herself next to the lockers to show how the association improved the working conditions. At the workshop, women shared that in the packing plant, workers run the risk of losing their phones or backpacks because they have nowhere to place them while they are at work. In other haciendas, backpacks and other belongings are laying along the walls of the packing plant, with workers keeping a close eye. The new lockers are next to the new co-ed bathrooms. In my interviews, women described the horrors of using bathrooms in other plantations (or no bathrooms at all) and described how much they appreciated the co-ed bathrooms.

A key example of how women's leadership in associations shapes gender parity in production is the case of Maria Alejandra, who not only works in the banana plantations, but was also president of the Association Rio Siete. In 2019, during the time of my research, the redistribution of Hacienda Rio Siete was at a standstill because both the MAG and the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecology have jurisdiction over the hacienda, and the Ministry of Energy has jurisdiction over the petroleum in the subsurface. In 2005, the military converted the banana plantations into guadua plantations, a bamboo endemic to the region, to export

to Peru and Chile. Today, Association Rio Siete, while navigating the uncertainty of their land title, produces the guadua as their main source of income. Most men in the associations had lived and worked on the hacienda since the 1990s, many migrating from the province of Manabi. During the time of Hdineagros, men lived in living quarters within the hacienda, often with their families. The gendered dynamics in Hacienda Rio Siete are different from those of the banana-producing haciendas. The military's old buildings had deteriorated and are remnants of the past. The *socios* of Rio Siete utilized their guadua harvest to rebuild their homes and to create a community space that functions as a soccer field on the weekends.

The workers of Hacienda Rio Siete incorporated their wives into the association to meet the gender quota of Plan Tierras, albeit with limited work opportunities for women. The men in the associations harvest the guadua bamboo and haul the cane to the front of the hacienda using a horse or mule. During the time of Hdineagros, women cooked meals for the workers. When the military left, so did the *señora* (the main cook), and so the wives of the workers began cooking and earning their own income by cooking lunch for Association Rio Siete. Single men who live in Rio Siete also rely on the cooking of these women. Maria Alejandra along with her colleagues developed a plan to convert five hectares of their land to cacao to increase the working opportunities for women in the guadua bamboo plantations. In three years, cacao cultivation should render work opportunities for a third of the women living in Hacienda Rio Siete.

Maria Alejandra learned to navigate institutional bureaucratic entanglement through her leadership role in the association, and, in the process, affiliated to a national movement organization called the Coordinadora Nacional Campesina – Eloy Alfaro. At the workshop, she shared with the group that being the president of the association required courage and confidence that she can lead – *liderazgo* (leadership skills). While she waits for the land title, she works for Hacienda La Pagua and generates income by selling food on the weekend or by working on a shrimp farm. What the story of Maria Alejandra tells us is that not all women's participation in associations is equal and, in this case, it highlights the gendered challenges of navigating both the uncertainty of land and labor precarity.

Even if women are not part of the association, they still advise their husbands or partners about important decisions. In other words, women play an important role at home in helping husbands make decisions about their associative life, even if they lack direct access to land themselves. In the *adjudicacion*, or provincial land title, the association collective owns it; the member is listed with no indication of what rights family members are entitled to.

The second benefit of collective land ownership is that of the shared earnings of the associations and the additional income from working. *Socias* increased their income under the association, largely due to the contracts they (La Chaguana and La Guayas) have with GinaFruit, guaranteeing the associations a consistent price for the box of bananas. Working on the plantations was new for many women. They appreciate the liberties of working and earning their own income and supporting their families. “*Ya tengo mi casita*” – *I got my own home now* – said Dolores as she smiled and confirmed her participation as a member of the association. Dolores is in her 60s, and she previously cooked for Hdineagros. She later found membership in La Guayas and works in the washing of bananas in the packing plant. Earnings are based on the scale of production. Association La Guayas can typically guarantee at least three days of work for women in the packing plant, whereas the other associations might offer fewer days of work. For example, Hacienda La Sabana has lower production and unstable contracts for the sale of bananas. Women in La Sabana (both *socias* and *trabajadoras*) generate income in other ways because of the low productivity in the plantation. In the case of Rio Siete, women find alternative ways to generate income while they wait for the land title, particularly because the cultivation of guadua bamboo is exclusively tasked for men.

The income of women ranges from US \$17 – 20 dollars daily. Most women working for the associations said they worked at least once a week. The difference between pay for women working in the packing plants compared to men working in the fields is nearly twofold, with men earning twice what women do. Women are more likely to talk about their income by what they make a day, while men are more likely to tell me about their monthly salary, near the minimum state-mandated salary of \$395 in 2019. Even within the packing plant, the day’s pay varies. Those who work in the *cuadrilla* who are *fumigando* or washing the bunch, or placing the stickers on the bananas, are also enumerated differently. In short, women throughout the associations earned

less money than men as both a *socia* and as a *trabajadora*. Despite the wage gap, most of the *trabajadoras* preferred working for the associations because of the better working conditions and pay. Esther, a *trabajadora* told me, “It’s very different to see how other haciendas that I know prefer men, and women are paid less...[the association] pays well here. I have my daughters in other haciendas, and they receive \$12 or \$15 a day and they work more and leave around 6 or 7 p.m. and are not recognized for their hours. Here they recognize our hours and more.”

Navigating Labor Precarity

In the previous section, I discussed the importance of land ownership for women and how women in leadership roles and as members of the associations influence decision-making processes on the plantation. In this section, I use the photographs from the photovoice project to detail the lived experiences of women working in and outside of the plantations, to make the point about how women invoke their labor flexibility as a response to labor precarity in the banana industry. In Ecuador, the banana industry relies on the flexibility of the “permanent-temporary” worker who works mostly in the *cuadrillas* (packing crew), and who is “temporary” in the sense that they work based on the number of banana boxes needed for the day (Martinez Valle, 2004). The “temporary” worker lacks social security, health care and economic security – things that permanent workers are entitled to – and are often in a precarious condition. A feminist lens reveals how labor precarity in the banana industry shapes women in different ways. In this case, the limited opportunities to work beyond one or two days pushes women to juggle multiple income-generating opportunities, such as collecting cacao pods, picking tangerines, fishing for tilapia, or working on the local shrimp farms. Women who are members of the associations (*socias*) and women working for the associations (*trabajadoras*) rotate to other haciendas, while others only work on the weekends selling food at community events. Thus, the flexibility of working in different positions in the banana sector also translates to women’s flexibility to generate income in other ways. Victoria, who is member of La Guayas, put this flexibility into words at the workshop, sharing that “women are multifaceted” and are undervalued because of their gender.

Women work in the packing plant, the kitchen cooking lunch for the workers, and in the administrative offices. Only a few women mentioned working in the field, and if they did, it was to help their husbands finish their plot of bananas. Working in the packing plants means you work in different positions and often must rotate to another position with short notice. Being part of an organization with collective decision-making processes was a new and a learning process for most of the women working in the banana plantations. In Association La Guayas, women who formerly worked for the military in secretarial positions joined the association and led the early efforts to increase the number of women working in the plantations. Their experience with Hdineagros helped the associations continue to improve the working conditions for both men and women and helped to meet international certifications such as Global G.A.P., a certification focused on food safety and upholding phytosanitary standards. Other organizations note that La Guayas benefited from the continual managerial support from Hdineagros, contributing to a sense of uneven development among them.

A typical day starts early in the morning around 4 or 5 am when a mother prepares breakfast for her children and gets them ready for school, right before heading off to the bus stop for work. In this narrative, this mother works in Hacienda Juana Fernandez in El Guabo, a town known for banana production. The major highway linking the city of Guayaquil to the southern coast runs through El Guabo. Hacienda Juana Fernandez is located adjacent to other banana plantations and most workers are transported from a bus stop in town to the hacienda, because it is far and an unevenly paved road to travel. Everyone works until the bananas are boxed or sundown, which can be as late as 6 or 7 p.m.

Depending on the scale of production, women can work from one to all days of the week. Sometimes women rotate to a different position to help each other with the repetitiveness of the task and strain on the body. A worker explained to me this is also a benefit because she feels confident to work in “harder” tasks in the packing plant, such as cutting the stalks and stacking them. “We cut the stalk and rotate, one week her and then me. Since the other women do not want to cut the stalk because it’s heavy and hard work, we benefit a bit more.” Women are rotated into different positions and learn by doing. Overall, women are

prepared to work in all positions, from the field to the packing plants. The participant's photographs illustrate how women work in different positions throughout the packing plant.

Figure 8. Women use a sharp tool to remove the bananas from the stem



Figure 9. Women unhook the stem from the cable and stack them.



Figure 10. Women climb into the water bath to deep clean before filling with water again to wash the bananas.



Figure 11. Women remove the protective bag from the banana



Figure 12. Women clean the thin foam sheets and stack them in storage for reuse on the plantation. These foam sheets protect the banana bunches.



Figure 13. Women keep track of the number of banana bunches and plastic bags they have washed.



Labor precarity, or the uncertainty of having work and income, means that women are consistently finding ways to generate income outside of the banana industry. Women, if hired, are paid less than men, specifically if they are working in the packing plant. Their position in the packing plant is a result of the gendered division of labor that relegates women's labor to the selecting and packaging of bananas. Options for other forms of employment are limited for women, and they rely on their friends and family to find them work opportunities. Men are chosen for fieldwork and maintaining the banana fields, and they work most days of the week.

When women are not working in the banana plantations, they are earning income in other ways. One participant in the project documented the diversity of work she performs throughout the week, including harvesting cacao and *naranjilla* (tangerine), and fishing for tilapia.

Figure 14. Women harvest the tangerine.



Figure 15. Women also harvest the cacao



Figure 16. Women fish for tilapia.



Figure 17. Women also attend to household chores like milking the cow.



Women help their husbands in the field to help finish their plot of bananas quicker, yet they are not compensated for their labor. This is the case of Hacienda La Sabana, where the few women who work in the hacienda are mostly the wives of the *socios*. This hacienda produces fewer bananas than the other haciendas and generates fewer earnings. Low production means women who are either a member of the association (*socia*) or a worker for the association, supplement their work by selling food to the local community. This is a key example of how the scale of production, combined with the gendered division of labor in bananas, limits women's work opportunities. While women have access to land, their ability to benefit from land is limited because their work is relegated to the packing plant, and they are only called to work on the days the bananas are harvested and boxed.

Figure 18. Women sell cooked meals at events to earn income.



In Hacienda Rio Siete, women use their parcel of land to grow crops and to care for chickens and pigs to ensure their food security. During the week, women take care of the household chores and attend to their *huerto* or family garden, supplementing most of the food they eat. Sonia, the wife of a member of Rio Siete, sells chicken for \$20 as primary source of income. If there were more opportunities to work in Rio Siete, she would do it.

Figure 19. Living in Hacienda Rio Siete, women rely on harvesting their own food and raising chickens to feed themselves and to sell to earn additional income.



Figure 20. Women wash clothes by hand and take care of the household chores.



The Plan Tierras' gender quota improved women's access to land, but a closer look reveals the limitations to benefiting from land rights. Opportunities to generate income from land ownership are dependent on the

scale of production of the plantation and the ability of the association to secure contracts with exporters. Even women who are members of the associations lack job security because of the scale of production. For women working for the associations, smaller to medium-sized producers hire them for one or two days of packing, leaving them to search for work for the rest of the week. A women's position within the packing plant earns lower wages than men's positions, and hardly benefit from any social provisions.

"Nunca termina nuestro trabajo" – refers to how women's work is never done. Women contribute to household social reproduction in multiple ways by balancing their paid and unpaid work. Most women said they come back home to cook for their children and attend to their homework. Often, family members are helping with childcare. In some cases, mothers will bring their children to work. Women also go to school, to church, and spend time with family and friends when they are not earning income. Dozens of images depicted women and their families in the kitchen or eating at a table or a large gathering. Women compromise their household responsibilities, including spending time with their families, as they navigate work insecurity. Women spend time traveling between different plantations or as much as more than two hours south to work in the shrimp farms.

Conclusion: Land and the Mujer Trabajadora (Woman Worker)

In this article I argue that women's ability to benefit from land rights in Ecuador's banana industry is limited by the gendered division of labor on the plantation and the struggle for small- to medium-scale producers to secure contracts for the export of their bananas. The Plan Tierra's redistribution of land and bananas to rural associations generated a twofold process. As land beneficiaries, women partake in leadership positions and decision-making processes that shape the direction of the association and production, and they have increased their overall income because of the shared earnings. Improvements in production and working conditions increased work opportunities for women. However, for some women who are part of small-scale banana producing associations, their work opportunities on the plantation are limited. Generally, women working in the packing plant are called for work in the harvesting and packaging of the bananas that are in most cases immediately shipped to the port that same day. Women's work is based on the association's ability

to secure a contract for export. This was particularly true for the associations La Guayas and La Chaguana that had a contract with the exporter GinaFruit and can guarantee at least three days of work for women in the packing plant, while association La Pagua and La Sabana might offer one or two days of work.

The limited work opportunities in the banana industry are based on the gendered division of labor which places men in the field and women in the packing plant. This gendered division of labor is prevalent in Latin America, where women entered the workforce with the introduction of the cardboard box for the packaging of the banana in the 1960s. In the Caribbean, the gendered division of labor is different with women more likely to own banana plantations.

The photovoice project held with women banana workers (both members and workers of the associations) revealed that women respond to labor precarity in different ways. Women's role in social reproduction is integral to how they respond to labor precarity in the banana industry. Some women help their husbands or partners on the banana plantations to help them finish their task quicker but are often unremunerated for this work. Many women also sell food to earn additional income. Some women sell meat on a stick, while others cook lunch for the associations. Women also work in neighboring banana plantations, harvest the cacao and tangerine, fish for tilapia, and help in the cleaning of shrimp at the shrimp farms.

During the workshop, women acknowledged the state failed to protect them. Maria Alejandra, who was the president of the Association Rio Siete, shared at the workshop that women should seize the opportunities to be leaders and take ownership over their lives.

There are no gender-focused mechanisms in the banana industry in Ecuador, despite having institutions, laws, policies, and programs aimed specifically at promoting the industry. International certifications and Fairtrade initiatives improve gender pay parity in some cases, but a national policy for gender rights in the banana sector that would promote union organizing is still lacking. The incorporation of women into agricultural associations fostered identities such as the *mujer trabajadora*, which is also used in government campaigns. The *Súper Mujer Rural* (Great Rural Woman) campaign aims to highlight the multiple ways women contribute to social reproduction and to national agricultural production for consumption. In 2019, MAG

fostered community events and workshops that collected the experiences of women rural workers throughout the country in order to write a policy focused on rural women. The results of the nation-wide workshops were compiled in the *Estrategia Nacional Agropecuaria para Mujeres Rurales* (National Agricultural Strategy for Rural Women), a document proposing public policies and other incentives aimed at making visible the role rural women play in agriculture. What remains to be seen is how this initiative will address the banana industry's entrenched gendered disparities and increase women's ability to own banana plantations and benefit from land rights.

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation is a study of how land rights, banana contracts, and gendered ideologies and practices coalesce to shape the agrarian landscape and rural livelihoods on Ecuador's southern coast. I analyzed the redistribution of the military's banana plantations to the former workers as part of the Plan Tierras land redistribution project. The workers formed five associations to apply to the Plan Tierras program in 2012 and in 2015, four of the associations successfully gained the provisional land title to the military's banana plantations located in El Oro. The associations – La Chaguana, La Guayas, La Sabana, and La Pagua – produce bananas for exports. Association Rio Siete, whose members worked in the military's guadua bamboo plantations, is still waiting for the land title and sells the bamboo to local and regional markets. I tell the story of how former banana plantation workers navigate the global banana trade as new landowners and producers. In the process of waiting for the state and the land title, Association Rio Siete and the four other associations affiliated to the national movement organization Coordinadora Nacional Campesina - Eloy Alfaro (CNC-EA). In this conclusion, I summarize the main contributions of the dissertation and discuss future lines of research.

The Value of Land and Redistribution

The value of land determines what land beneficiaries can produce on the land. The associations are tied to the state's land management plan to pay back the state for the land transfer. The value of land is also preventing the transfer of ownership of Hacienda Rio Siete to Association Rio Siete. As Borras (2007) puts forth in his analysis of land redistribution in the Philippines – the degree of redistribution depends on the value of land. For the banana producers, establishing a contract with a large exporter secures their payments to the state and ensures work opportunities. In the case of Association Rio Siete, they need to invest in machinery to help clear debris and create pathways to access the bamboo plantation. The conditions of the plantations are far from generating the estimated value of the land at \$1 million. Untethering land beneficiaries from paying the state might resolve issues for associations falling into debt. If such were the case and there was no value linked to the land transfer, land beneficiaries would have the autonomy to produce

what they want under their terms. Instead, land redistribution and the ability for associations to secure their land rights is based on the price of land and market access.

The Sociology of Waiting and Social Movements

In Chapter One, I argue that multiple state institutions with jurisdictions over Hacienda Rio Siete hindered the redistribution of the hacienda to Association Rio Siete. These institutions play a role in determining the value of Hacienda Rio Siete, which is estimated to be valued at over \$1 million. The longer the dispute over the value of Hacienda Rio Siete, the more unattainable it becomes for Association Rio Siete to pay the state, whose members are investing their own resources to sustain the production of bamboo. Association Rio Siete needs the land title to expand their financial resources to invest in machinery and in labor to clear and harvest the bamboo. The association is also pushing to diversify their production and to provide work opportunities for women, who currently find work in neighboring plantations.

Waiting is a temporal and spatial processes. In the process of waiting for the state and their land title, Association Rio Siete, alongside their counterpart associations La Guayas, La Chaguana, La Pagua, and La Sabana, joined the national movement organization, CNC-EA. In joining the national organization, the local organization forms part of a national and international network of organizations. The CNC-EA's longtime involvement with legislation and policy-making spaces provides local organizations an institutional channel to the state, that is, closer access to the state. By incorporating local banana producers into the national organization, the CNC-EA expands the scope of pushing for land and territorial rights in the Andean highlands to representing banana plantation workers and labor rights on the southern coast. The CNC-EA utilizes the experiences of the producer associations and banana plantation workers to inform their advocacy and political campaigns against the free trade agreement between Ecuador and the European Union. Local organizations are called upon for national mobilizations that have recently taken place more often since the October 2019 national strike and protests.

A longtime proponent of food sovereignty and agrarian reform, the CNC-EA's inclusion of rural wage workers into their campaign points to how the conflicting class dynamics within the food sovereignty

movement in Ecuador can be reconciled. Henderson (2018) argues that not all rural social classes are represented in the unifying concept of food sovereignty. However, what Henderson's analysis points to is the variation in nation-movement organizations and their strategies for movement-building. The banana-producing associations in this study are former banana plantation workers themselves that navigate a fine line between landowner and worker. They wrestle with this identity as they make decisions that benefit them as an association and that at times marginalize workers. In Chapter Two, I show that the associations seek a contract with a large exporter to expand their market opportunities, which aligns with much of what others have said about the limitations and contradictions of food sovereignty, agro-extractivism, and peasant agriculture in Ecuador (Clark, 2017, Soper, 2020). That is, peasant farmers are turned into commodity producers for export that often go against the principles of food sovereignty in ensuring diverse cultural food availability in the country. In this case, rural wage workers are turned into landowners that in varying degrees ensure work opportunities and food security for their workers while also contributing to precariousness. However, the banana-producing associations coalesce around grievances against the state and for land and labor rights that match with the CNC-EA's mission. To that end, despite the class differences between landowners and workers – these issues resonate with the banana producing associations and explain why they joined the CNC-EA.

The Banana Contract Matters

In Chapter Two I analyze the banana contract and the contractual arrangement between associations La Chaguana and La Guayas and the exporter GinaFruit, to detail how the associations navigate the banana trade as new landowners. In doing so, I argue both producers and exporters adhere to the banana contract because they view the banana as a vehicle for economic development. This is exemplified in GinaFruit's company slogan, "We export the hope of a country" and the how the company emphasizes quality to expand their own market interests.

Ecuador's Banana Law requires that the producer and buyer register the banana contract with the Unibanano registry and that the contract contain a minimum set of provisions that protects the rights of both

the producer and the buyer. I argue the Associations La Chaguana and La Guayas seek the contract with the exporter GinaFruit because the company provides economic security. La Chaguana and La Guayas improved their practices and the working conditions of the packing plant to meet the environmental quality controls and international certification requirements imposed by GinaFruit. The associations are motivated to seek contracts and to export their bananas because of the materiality of production – which reflects how improvements in the production and packing of the banana increased the quantity and enhanced the quality of the bananas. Better quality means better market opportunities. However, their trust in the company and in the economic security of the contract was put to the test during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Global trade restrictions jeopardized producer-exporter relationships, including the banana contracts. During this time, GinaFruit failed to adhere to their end of the contract, costing the associations thousands of dollars for the containers of bananas they never sold. At least one of the associations is now selling to Chiquita bananas.

Unstable, unfulfilled, and unreliable banana contracts have ramifications for workers. Producers rely on the contract to ensure a steady supply of bananas and to schedule the work contracts with the packaging crew (workers who cut the bananas from the bunch, wash, select, and package the banana). At a moment's notice, exporters failing to pay or who undervalue the price of box of bananas can jeopardize the workers' livelihood. In contrast to banana producers in Central America, workers in Ecuador's banana industry seldom have had the institutional support to form banana unions. In fact, all members of the producer associations interviewed for my dissertation told me they never tried organizing before, and they had never talked of a union prior to Plan Tierras. There's potential for the Ecuadorian state to hold exporters accountable for unstable contracts, but this task seems unrealistic when the industry as a whole is experiencing changes resulting from COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russia imports over 90% of bananas from Ecuador (Pro Ecuador, 2021) and combined with Ukraine, accounts for about a quarter of Ecuador's exports. As a result of the war, from January to March of 2022, banana exports with Russia declined forty percent (Primicias, 2022). The state is responding to the crisis by controlling the price of bananas, extending credit

lines, and providing inputs to improve the quality of the banana. All the while, there's little or no mention of provisions in place to protect the banana workers whose lives depend on the whim of the banana trade.

The banana contract matters beyond the case of Ecuador. In the last decade, new producers, exporters, importers, and retailers entered the banana trade, decentralizing the distribution routes and challenging the market share of the top three international traders - Chiquita, Dole, and Del Monte. The expansion of port infrastructure, coupled with new refrigerated containers and vessels, is also paving the way for new trade relations and new contracts. A step towards accountability for the social and environmental impacts of the banana trade is to require the certification of international organizations such as Fair Trade International and Rainforest Alliance. As mentioned in Chapter Three, in 2021, 38 bananas producers in Ecuador were certified by Fairtrade – less than one percent of the number of producers registered with the UniBanano state registry. I am attentive to what Wilson and Jackson (2016) argued about Fairtrade International and its good intentions, which are failing to address local contexts in the implementation of its programing. In the case of Ecuador, international certification mechanisms must include gendered equity measures that provide workers with income stability, safe working environments from harassment, and reduction in the use and exposure of harmful chemicals in the field and packing plant.

Gender, Land, and Labor Flexibility

Women's access to farmland is underexplored (WBF-FAO, 2015). My research demonstrates how the Plan Tierra's gender quota is a direct mechanism that enhanced women's access to farmland. In Chapter Three I argue women's participation in the associations allowed them to partake in collective decision-making processes and in leadership roles. As I also show in Chapter Three, women have worked in the packing plant since the 1960s, limiting their workdays to the *dias de embarque* (shipment days), or to once or twice a week when the banana is packaged and ready for shipment. This is true for smaller associations such as Association La Sabana that only packages the banana once or twice a week, leaving women to search for work on other plantations.

My research also demonstrates how gendered disparities in the banana industry penetrate the household and women's ability to secure land rights and work opportunities. The photovoice project held with women banana workers revealed that women generate income in multiple ways as they navigate labor precarity in the banana industry. Women respond to the limited work opportunities by invoking their flexibility. Women whose work status is precarious rotate among the plantations and are required to be mobile and flexible with their time and ability to move from one physical place in the region to the other. Labor precarity persists in the industry because of the lack of institutional support for workers and unionization that would support basic social provisions. Women are also paid lower wages than men. Meanwhile, women work in the banana plantation one day and fish for tilapia the next day or sell food on the weekend at local community events. The film cameras used in this project were a methodological tool that allowed women to document how they work to earn income, support the family farm, and attend to the household chores. Here, women characterize themselves as multifaceted and they are – and they demonstrate how social reproduction is intertwined with the banana industry. The photographs echoed what the women exclaimed in the workshop, “our work is never done.”

The government reports that nearly sixty percent of food consumed in Ecuador is sourced from *agricultura familiar campesina*— family-based agriculture, farmland under 20 hectares, the majority led by women. Family-based agriculture also provides over seventy percent of employment in rural areas. For the first time, MAG instituted a national strategy focused on gender equity and rural women working and living from agriculture. The National Strategy for Rural Women in Agriculture approved in 2020 considers that women are central to social reproduction in the sense that women take care of the household, the farmland, and might work multiple jobs to sustain the family. The strategy aims to empower women throughout the agri-food system starting from supporting women's contributions in family-based agriculture to increasing access to land and promoting women's participation in agricultural associations. Indeed, these later points sound familiar. A lesson from this dissertation would suggest that gender quotas are a step towards addressing equity issues, but that they need to recognize the local, gendered dynamics of social reproduction and commodity production. The case of land rights in the banana industry highlights that not everyone benefits the same, and

that each case merits a deep understanding of how women can benefit from land that represents their local needs. For women in the banana industry, this might include more work opportunities that could help with parity in work hours and earning, but also the improvement of the work conditions and access to broader social benefits (childcare, health care).

The Sustainability of Bananas

Much of this research on the bananas has left me thinking about the sustainability of bananas – that is, can Ecuador and others continue to produce bananas in the age of climate change? The answer might simply be “not really” in the long term. I left Ecuador late November 2019, right before the spread and announcement of the Covid-19 pandemic. I analyzed my interviews and wrote most of my dissertation while living in the city of Fresno, located in the central valley and agricultural heartland of California. I came back to the U.S. with stories about the banana workers and the opportunities and challenges they faced as new landowners and small-scale banana producers. I am always asked about choice and which banana to buy - conventional, organic, or Fairtrade? I usually reframe this and try thinking about the sustainability of the banana. Is it all worth it? The price of bananas has remained relatively the same while the cost of inputs and transportation costs have dramatically risen. How many bananas go to waste not only in your home but at the supermarket? I do answer the question with: buy Fairtrade and organic, if possible, to support the workers and the environment.

California is the right place to study the Latin American banana trade. While Mexico and Central America supplied bananas to California in the early 20th century, Ecuador initiated exports to the southern coast in the 1930s with the onset of the United Fruit Company’s Berth 147 at the Port of Los Angeles – the most modern port for unloading bananas at the time. Ecuador also exported cacao to San Francisco decades before. Later, the Stanford Fruit Company (purchased by Castle and Cooke in 1967 and rebranded as Dole) invested in the port of Long Beach in 1965, and the company Del Monte relocated from Los Angeles to the central coast’s port of Hueneme in 1979. The port of Hueneme consistently ranks as the top third importer of bananas in the U.S. and the west coast’s leading importer of bananas (Port of Hueneme, 2017). Over time, the

modernization of port infrastructure resulted in the decline, if not elimination, of the stevedore, the workers responsible for unloading the bananas from the vessel on their backs and later offloading onto a conveyor belt. Since the 1990s, the unloading of bananas is automated, with cranes unloading containers and longshoremen operating forklifts (Reed, 1991).

Ships, especially stalled at the ports, are large sources of air pollution. The trucks that haul the banana and other goods through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are also large emitters of pollution, including diesel particulate matter, nitrogen and sulfur oxides, and greenhouse gases. In my next line of research, I examine the social and environmental health impacts of distributing the banana in southern California. This includes studying the changes in labor dynamics at the ports, local forms of dispossession and displacement, and the grassroots environmental organizations that are shaping California food and environmental policy. I think there are more parallels to be drawn between Ecuador and California, such as how local grassroots efforts – the food, environment, and climate-related movements in local places -- can have transnational implications. How these inter-related and distinct movements piece together – in solidarity -- is what I aim to find out next.

I grew up in Los Angeles with bananas everywhere – knowing that the bananas are down by the liquor store, used by the ice cream man for banana splits, mixed in a fruit cocktail by the fruit vendor, at the supermarket, in my niece’s school lunch, and as part of a relative’s nutritional diet at the California’s Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (the largest state food purchaser and food service provider). It’s probably no surprise I grew up with so many bananas: my own school district for nearly the entirety of my schooling (the Los Angeles Unified School District) continues to lead as the largest school district to supply free or reduced price breakfast and lunch at public schools. Free food and bananas makes California another important site to study the banana trade. This includes the food movements that have shaped food policy councils and food policy broadly in the state, such as the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, and the “Good Food” campaign. The latter aims to ensure that local and state procurement of food supports the local economy, environmental sustainability, labor rights, animal welfare, and nutrition. It could be the case that the bananas that ensure food security in Los Angeles might also contribute to precariousness in

Ecuador's southern coast. This new research offers insights into how the food justice and food sovereignty movements are shaping the agri-food system in places both local and global.

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