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GENDER, CLASS AND 'DEVELOPMENT' IN RURAL COASTAL ECUADOR

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Abstract

In this paper the author discusses the relationship between the situation of rural women and the development of agriculture within the specific context of agrarian reform in coastal Ecuador. The first half of the paper outlines the history of the changing sexual division of labour and the particular form of state intervention in coastal agriculture. The second half of the paper analyzes changes in four different factors of production affected by the agrarian reforms (land, technological inputs, credit and labour) as these, in turn, affect the farm or household. This analysis reveals both the contradictory effects of these changes on rural women and the nature of political struggles of rural women and men in this region.

Resumen

En esta monografía, la autora discute la relación entre la situación de la mujer rural y el desarrollo de la agricultura dentro del contexto específico de las reformas agrarias en la zona costeña del Ecuador. Bosqueja la historia de las transformaciones en la división del trabajo por sexo y la forma específica de la intervención del estado ecuatoriano en el agro costeño. Luego analiza, a nivel de la unidad de producción agrícola, cuatro factores de producción que fueron modificados por las reformas agrarias (la tierra, la tecnología, el crédito y el trabajo). Este análisis revela los efectos contradictorios de la reforma agraria para la mujer rural y también el carácter de las luchas de las mujeres y los hombres en el campo costeño.

Introduction

There is a difficulty in assessing the precise relationship between 'gender' and 'development' in rural Ecuador. This difficulty stems from at least two factors: 1) there exist very few data on the country's agrarian reforms which differentiate beneficiaries, agricultural cooperative members, landowners, etc. on the basis of gender, and 2) Ecuador's reforms have included women only inasmuch as women are members of 'families'; no reforms have been developed to directly involve rural women as beneficiaries. This latter point indicates that even if we did have access to accurate data on women within the agrarian reform context, such information would help us little in the question of the specific character of gender relations in a changing rural Ecuador.

My own theoretical perspective on this subject is very much informed by my work in coastal Ecuador, where agriculture has been subject to reforms of various types over the last twenty years. My experience in this region, particularly in the Guayas River Basin,[1] indicates that rather than land redistribution,

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1. Ecuador is divided into three distinct regions: the sierra or highlands, the costa or coast and the oriente or eastern region. Although there are significant historical features which have given rise to these three regions, the Ecuadorian state has not

the most significant factor in the lives of the rural population over the last decade is the development and expansion of commodity relations. This development is closely linked to Ecuador's agrarian reforms, although it clearly has had repercussions beyond the agrarian reform programme itself.

The pervasiveness of wage relations in the coastal countryside has given rise to two related processes, both of which have had detrimental effects on women. One is the intensification of the sexual division of labour, where the identities of men have become more and more tied into their relationship to capital (as agricultores), while the identities of women are much more closely linked to an occupation more marginalized from capital, that of doméstica or 'housewife'. The second process is one where most rural households are experiencing an increase in production output but decreasing returns to their labour (the 'reproduction squeeze', as Bernstein [1979] puts it). Under the 'reproduction squeeze' it is women's labour in particular which has been greatly intensified to meet the needs of household reproduction.

On the other hand, something which is essential to our understanding of gender relations in this region is the fact that

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been unimportant in reinforcing their distinctiveness: the 1964 programme was primarily concerned to eliminate the huasipungo system of serfdom in the sierra, and promote colonization of the oriente in order to relieve population pressures in the highlands, while the 1970 reforms were directed mainly at problems in coastal agriculture.

in no way is the process of commoditization 'complete'.[2] In fact, an extension and intensification of commodity relations in the reproduction cycle of farm units has taken place without the formation of two distinct classes. While there is no doubt that very wealthy and very poor people live in the countryside, it is important to note that a 'limited differentiation' exists in the sense that market relationships stop just short of completely eroding the non-market ties (most often expressed in the idiom of kinship) which bind many rural households together. The interesting point for our purposes is that much of women's contribution to the household comes from their control over such ties. Manipulating such ties allows women to borrow food and money, gain information about jobs, etc. Thus, while women are marginalized from valued resources (from the point of view of capital, and by virtue of the sexual division of labour), it is precisely the division of labour which gives them power at this particular juncture. Such points are essential to consider if we are to understand how women themselves struggle to resolve the kinds of problems they face, given the state's apparent lack of interest on this subject.

Considering the complexity of the situation, a thorough analysis of gender and development in rural Ecuador would involve (at the very least) an exploration of a history of the sexual

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2. Here I am referring to Friedmann's argument that the end point of the commoditization process is the "separation of households from all ties except those of the market" (1980:163).

division of labour and the expansion of capitalism; an understanding of the context in which the country's agrarian reform programmes arose; the direct effects of the programmes on the lives of women and men; the precise extent to which agrarian relations have become commoditized and how this has modified daily life; the nature of non-commoditized ties and their links to gender relations in the countryside; and the forms of political struggle for both women and men in this context.

Within one short paper, however, it would be impossible to do an indepth analysis of all these factors, although I will try to touch on most of these points, however briefly, in an attempt to bridge the gap between larger economic/political structures and the everyday lives of rural costeños. This paper is organized as follows. First, I offer some key points concerning the history of the coast and sketch the context within which agrarian reform became important in Ecuador. Then I outline the effects, at the level of the rural household, of commoditization on the production and exchange of agricultural products. Finally I explore the relationship between a limited differentiation in the countryside and the forms of political struggle for the rural population.

Historical Background

Essential to an understanding of the effects of the agrarian

reform on the sexual division of labour and on women in particular is an awareness of the historical changes in the sexual division of labour itself.[3] This section explores the relationship between the expansion of capitalism on the coast and the segmentation of the rural labour force along gender lines.

Before the 1920's the social relations of production on the coast involved large landholdings dedicated almost entirely to the production of cacao. There is ample evidence to show that these cacao haciendas were dependent specifically upon the use of family labour, where men, women and childen were involved in the same project of producing cacao for export. Sembradores (renters) were contracted by large (often absentee) landlords to clear virgin land and to plant an appropriate number of cacao trees. These trees took 5 to 7 years to reach maturation, at which time the sembrador was paid for each healthy tree and then moved on to another plot. Sembradores could not hold such contracts unless they were "married and with a family" (Chiriboga 1980:199). Once the cacao was mature, jornaleros (day labourers) were hired to maintain and harvest the cacao trees. All family members of the jornalero were also expected to take part in this work, although a wage differential existed depending on gender

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3. One can divide the history of the coast into two distinct periods: before and after the cacao crisis of the 1920s. Although agricultural production was tranformed in a major way by the collapse of the cacao market in the 1920s, it is important to understand the system of production in the pre-1920 period because it had implications for the organization of labour for some time after the crisis.

and age (Guerrero 1980).

In the 1920s, Ecuador's economy fell into a deep crisis which was to last for almost two decades. Cacao exports were cut to an absolute minimum with the loss of the European market in the first World War, and exports were just beginning to recover when the cacao haciendas themselves were hit hard by plant diseases (especially Witch's Broom). Most hacienda land was sold, rented or simply abandoned during this time. Thousands of agricultural workers flooded the coastal city of Guayaquil. Chiriboga (1980:409) estimates that around 25,000 people were expelled from the cacao haciendas.

The period between 1925 and 1938 was one of frequent bankruptcy and considerable hacienda fragmentation. It is clear that social relationships in the countryside, both those which tied the labouring population together and - since the crisis created tremendous unemployment in rural areas - those which tied the labourer to the hacendado, were completely shattered. On the other hand, however, some tenants were able to retain 'precarious' positions growing rice within the old cacao haciendas. Smallholders, who either took over abandoned land or were able to purchase inexpensive plots, appeared for the first time in almost a century.

During this period, a system of precarismo ('precarious' land tenancy) became the dominant form of production for the cultivation of rice, now the most important crop in the region.

Under precarismo, renters paid 1 to 2 quintals of rice for each cuadra of land rented from the landowner.[4] This was usually by verbal contract only.[5] Agricultural technology remained very rudimentary, with all phases of rice production being undertaken by hand. Rice tenants were responsible for sowing, harvesting and hiring additional labour when it was needed in production. This indicated once again a considerable control by labour over the production process, although tenants were also dependent upon money lenders (fomentadores) and intermediaries for the marketing of their rice harvests.

It was during this time that there emerged a new identity for rural coastal labour: that of the montuvio.[6] In the 1930s, José De La Cuadra wrote one of the first extensive, albeit rather impressionistic, accounts of the Ecuadorian montuvio. In his work De La Cuadra emphasizes that rice production, both within and outside of the hacienda, was undertaken on a family basis.

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4. One quintal (qq.) equals 200 lbs. of unmilled rice. One cuadra is 3/4 of a hectare.

5. Because of this, no records of such contracts exist in the property registries.

6. Although one can find reference to the montuvio before the cacao crash, the term montuvio itself seemed to evolve most clearly after the cacao crisis. The montuvio, referring generally to the coastal labourer irrespective of whether s/he was technically a peasant or a wage hand, was seen to have characteristics quite different from the sierran rural labourer (usually characterized as 'Indian'), but it is possible to argue that the montuvio identity and the indio identity were similarly important for maintaining the labour structure of agricultural production in the respective regions (Middleton 1979).

He notes that the roles of men and women in agricultural production were entirely interchangeable "from milking a cow to sowing rice with a digging stick" (1937:41). He also states that: "In the concerns of proper campesino tasks, the woman, with logical exclusions, is as capable and as expert as the male montuvio" (ibid). Of course we do not know to which 'logical' exclusions De La Cuadra is referring, but it does appear that at least for the period just after the cacao crisis, family labour, and here we are noting in particular women's labour, continued to be important in agricultural production.

A flexibility in the sexual division of labour apparently existed despite the fact that between the period of 1930 and 1948 rice became increasingly commercialized. Although a great deal of rice was grown for consumption, it clearly was considered a 'cash crop' at this time since renters were also given garden plots for subsistence purposes.[7]

With the influx of sugar and banana interests in the 1940s, however, land prices on the coast began to increase dramatically. Both sugar and banana companies were able to buy a great deal of inexpensive land around Guayaquil and Babahoyo at the time of the cacao collapse. By the 1940s, these interests

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7. In 1938, more than 20,000 metric tons of rice - almost all of it grown in the Guayas River Basin - were exported out of the country, although some 52,000 metric tons were actually harvested, according to a Pan American Union publication (1949, 1954). In 1947, 61,981 metric tons of rice were exported and 111,000 metric tons were produced on the coast.

were aided by the new credit available from Ecuadorian banks, and soon previously uncultivated lands in the Guayas River Basin and south of Guayaquil in the province of El Oro became prized territory (Larrea 1982). This new movement of capital into the countryside often came into direct conflict with tenants who had become quite entrenched in agricultural production by this time; many long-term renters, called finqueros, considered themselves landowners. According to Guerrero (1978), some peasant cooperatives were formed in order to combat the problem of big land take-overs during this time, but these quickly disappeared when the peasants involved were unable to pay their bank loans.

The dramatic shift in agricultural production on the coast compared with the pre-1925 and 1930 periods is revealed sharply in a study done by Olen Leonard in the mid-1940s. Leonard was involved in an agricultural project "designed to develop, improve and increase the production in the Republic [of Ecuador] of certain crops that are needed but not produced in continental United States" (1947:1). For this project he undertook a household survey of a large cacao/rice hacienda in the Guayas River Basin. Leonard notes the emergence of a number of important features: 1) medium and small, not large landholdings are the norm; 2) the policies of the hacienda vary but at the time of the study mostly day labourers are being hired; 3) there is a significant number of foreign landowners in the area; 4) the hacienda is self-sufficient, with a school, stores, and its own police force; 5) there is a high rate of intra-provincial

migration - only 1/4 of the hacienda population had lived there for more than 10 years, and 6) women are not involved in agricultural production, "their duties are largely limited to domestic tasks" (ibid:8).

This is the earliest statement that I have found referring to the fact that coastal women did not work in the fields. Why and how this came to be the case is not clear. However, it is likely that the relationship in this case between a more extensive use of day labourers, the (by then) abundant supply of labour, the increased demand for domestic service with the remarkable expansion of Guayaquil (cf.Crummett, 1985), and the simultaneous entry of more commercial forms of agricultural production on the coast, is the key to this new exclusion of women from agricultural production. Such an argument awaits further research.

The Emergence of a State Bureaucracy

By turning to the banana industry we gain some insight into the nature of the economic changes taking place in coastal agriculture after the 1940s. With the emergence of the banana 'boom', the national economy itself reached a critical stage of capitalist development, triggering conditions which made investment in agricultural production on the coast essential.

The year 1948 was an important one for Ecuador because it signalled the recuperation of the country's export market with the emergence of the banana boom. Galo Plaza, President of Ecuador from 1948-1952, claims to have been visited by the United Fruit Company during this time and assured that Ecuador had the potential for at least ten good years of banana production. According to Plaza, "Ecuador needed badly a new export crop to replace the fast-fading rice crop" (1955:39), and it was under his government that banana production increased dramatically on the coast, making Ecuador "the world's largest exporter of this fruit in a matter of a few years" (Larrea 1982:3). Banana production was based exclusively on wage labour - primarily male labour - where workers earned salaries higher than in other agricultural activities on the coast.

It is important to note that during Plaza's presidency much capital was also invested in renovating rice and cacao production on the coast. In 1949, the government instituted the Empresa de Renovación del Cacao and centres were established in coastal towns to disseminate new types of cacao seeds which were disease-resistant. Apparently following the path of the banana producers, those landowners who attempted to renovate their cacao haciendas tried to hire wage labour only. Although this policy clearly met resistance from tenants - and Uggen (1975) has detailed the ensuing conflict for the case of Yaguachi - it is significant that as much as 52% of the rural labour force on the coast were independent day labourers by 1954, while only 2% of

agricultural workers could be categorized as such in the sierra (Hurtado 1980).

Not unrelated to this new surge of capital into the countryside was the fact that by the 1950s the American presence in Ecuador was strong, and on the coast it was found concretely in the form of the Agency for International Development (AID). It had not escaped the notice of the U.S. that Ecuador had as many as 21 presidents between 1931 and 1948 and was considered to be "the most politically unstable of the Latin American Republics" (Bromley 1977:44). That the United States was worried about Ecuadorian political stability is clear in the evidence of C.I.A. activities in the country during this time (Agee 1975).

The role of AID during this period was to promote 'peaceful agrarian reform' (Redclift 1979:192). Contrary to the previous history of rural development in coastal Ecuador, the Ecuadorian government was now expected to control agricultural development, and U.S. loans were made available on the understanding that it would take up this role. An Instituto Nacional de Colonización was formed - colonization being seen as the solution to the growing rural unrest caused by the conflict between landowners who were beginning to invest capital in their holdings and tenant labourers fighting for their continued access to land. In 1958 the Institute suddenly ordered the dissolution of any political alliance between the coastal peasants and the Communist Party (the latter was soon made illegal). This was said to be

necessary because "a workers' syndicate was not the proper form of organization for finqueros or tenants, who must form instead an agricultural cooperative" (Uggen 1975:167). The cooperative movement was a direct result of AID's activities; the organization had already begun experimenting with cooperatives on the coast, apparently with some success in increasing rice production levels.

Thus, by the late 1950s, there was a strange conglomeration of production relations in the coastal countryside. While there existed wage labourers in the banana and sugar plantations, peasant production of rice and cacao was still important although, to be sure, threatened by the increasing commoditization of the countryside. This period marked the emergence of the peasantry as an important political entity on the coast, but it also signalled the unprecedented attempt of the Ecuadorian state to manipulate this entity.

The Agrarian Reform Programme

By 1964, a provisional military Junta had introduced Ecuador's first agrarian reform programme. Ecuador's plans for agrarian reform were not devised independently but were closely aligned to the development ideas of the Alliance for Progress in the early 1960s. The Alliance for Progress was essentially an American vehicle for the promotion of capitalist development in

Latin America, seen by the U.S. as essential for the prevention of another Cuban revolution.

The U.S. Department of Defense claimed in 1966 that "Our major objective in Latin America is the promotion of economic and social development" (1966:80). Such development was to take place primarily through industrialization. This was not a particularly new strategy since industrialization had been seen as the key solution to the 'underdevelopment' of Latin American countries in the '40s and '50s, but before the 1960's, agriculture had always been viewed as a 'given' - "something...you could drain resources from without need of replacement."[8] By the '60s, agriculture suddenly had an important role to play in industrialization - both in terms of producing food for urban consumption and in terms of providing an expanded consumer market for industry (Zaldivar 1974). For this plan to work, changes in the agricultural sectors of Latin America were seen as essential, and appropriate reform laws were developed.

Although Ecuador passed an Industrial Development Law in 1957 - with a clear import substitution bias - it was not until 1964 that the ruling Military Junta passed the country's first Agrarian Reform Law. The Reform Law was developed to promote change specifically in those areas of agriculture which were seen

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8. This a quote from two A.I.D. officials in Petras & LaPorte (1971:412).

to restrict the accumulation of capital (servile labour systems, patronage, 'feudal'-minded hacendados, etc.). Because the coast was seen to be far more advanced than the sierra in this respect, this Reform Law focused primarily on sierran agriculture (Verduga 1978). Coastal landowners could own 2,500 hectares of land (plus 1,000 hectares of pasture) without fear of expropriation. Even if they owned more than that such landowners could avoid expropriation if they incorporated themselves (Uggen 1975), a practice which was not uncommon.

However, one important consequence of the reform for the coast was the formation of IERAC, the Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization. IERAC soon began competing for peasant support and eventually entered into an alliance with CEDOC, the Ecuadorian Confederation of Catholic Workers (Uggen 1975). CEDOC was based in the sierra, backed by the Catholic Church and generally thought to represent a 'conservative' peasantry. Uggen persuasively argues that, by banning the PCE (Communist Party) and creating a peasant segment on the coast which accepted the idea of monetary compensation to landowners for expropriated land (a IERAC policy), "the junta hoped to drive a wedge into the peasant movement and create a national peasant movement dependent on the government" (1975:211).

By the late '60s, however, coastal agricultural was in dismal shape. Within a short period of time, the coast had experienced a sharp fall in banana exports and two severe

droughts. An increasing number of land invasions were taking place as hacendados began evicting tenants. From the hacendado's point of view, precarismo had become an increasingly inefficient system for the production of rice, primarily because of the emerging commodity relations in other areas of agriculture. The influx of foreign capital (especially in banana production) now determined the conditions of production in the Guayas River Basin as a whole and signalled a need for investment within the rice/cacao hacienda in particular.[9] Under such conditions, 'mixed' farming became an important alternative for these hacendados, and cattle soon dominated sections of land previously reserved for the precaristas' agricultural production (Redclift 1976).

Finally, a government decree (Decreto 1001) in 1970 was introduced to have a more radical impact on the coastal agrarian situation. Like the 1964 Reform, it did not touch banana and sugar interests.[10] However, rice precarismo became illegal and attempts were made to organize ex-precaristas into cooperatives, through what had been called the Land Sale Guarantee Plan

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9. According to one survey, it was because of increasing 'internal costs' that the export of rice had become impractical by the 1950s. Its export was heavily subsidized until the mid-'60s when rice exports were discontinued altogether (Overseas Economic Surveys, 1954).

10. According to Uggen (1975), banana and sugar plantation owners had a strong voice in Congress during this period.

(Blankstein & Zuvekas 1973).[11] In recognition of the complexity of coastal agricultural problems, state intervention was to take the form of a 'development package', involving the collaboration of various interests (the government, industrialists, bankers) to promote changes in marketing and in the small producer's access to land, credit and technology.

It appears, however, that little in the way of coastal 'reform' took place outside a small group of cooperatives until 1973, when Ecuador's second Agrarian Reform Law was passed, once again by a Military Junta. To some, the 1973 Reform was a 'watered down version' of the previous Decrees, but in many ways it was with this reform that the state's vision of agricultural progress on the coast was clearest, i.e., to develop capitalist agriculture. For example, no ceilings were placed on the size of landholdings[12] and agricultural credit was greatly expanded due to the new oil riches of the country in 1972. Recognizing that the country needed to steer from a dependence on single export products (cacao, bananas, oil) for its economic development, the Junta hoped to create some economic stability in key areas of the country (e.g., the Guayas River Basin) by quickly reinvesting oil

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11. By the 1960s, some 46,000 tenant families were working about 160,000 hectares of land under the precarismo system (Redclift 1978). In almost all of the cooperatives which were formed only the ownership of the land is communal; agricultural production is individualized.

12. That the farm unit was fulfilling its 'social function' was considered more important (Redclift 1978).

revenues into agricultural production. Thus, as oil revenues began to overshadow revenues from agricultural exports, the level of investment within the country greatly increased (Bocco 1982).

Yet, the most significant characteristic of changes in the agrarian sector after the reforms has less to do with the distribution of landed property than with the role of commodity relations and the development of an expanded consumer market. We can say this because, first of all, it is quite clear that decreases in the number of large property holdings on the coast were taking place long before the agrarian reform programme was implemented. In fact Saunders (1961) mentions that large landowners were slimming their property sizes as early as the 1950s - a period, as I have already noted, which marked the beginning of large-scale capital investment on the coast.

The second point to made in this regard is that despite its rhetoric concerning land re-distribution, the agrarian reform programme has influenced the <u>concentration</u> of landholdings very little. In the province of Los Ríos (where my work was done), if one takes the top 40% of the largest sized UPAS (agricultural production units) there has been no change from 1954 to 1974; in both years these UPAs controlled 95% of the land (INEC 1954, 1974). According to Redclift's (1978) figures, the percentage of land owned (as opposed to rented) in Los Rios increased by only 1.8% between 1972 and 1974. Redclift also points out that even within the specific period of greatest reform activity for the

coast (1972-1974), little change in land distribution had taken place in the reform programme's prime target area, i.e., the rice zone of the Guayas River Basin. "In global terms", Redclift notes, "only about 7% of the land considered ripe for expropriation had been finally handed over to the ex-precaristas who had worked it" (1978:127).[13] It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that the agrarian reform programme had a minimal impact on the re-distribution of landed property.[14]

Thus, despite the fact that the agrarian reforms are said to have been formulated 'for the campesino', it is likely that the primary aim of the Decree and Reform Law was to eliminate remaining obstacles to the accumulation of capital on the coast.[15] Specifically, this meant increasing rice yields through the use of technological inputs, and 'rationalizing' rice

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13. This transfer of land, as I have already noted, primarily involved male beneficiaries. Since precaristas were the main target group and these tenants were primarily men, women most often did not qualify. One study in the Guayas River Basin found that of the 3,147 beneficiaries polled, only 5.7% were women (CEDEGE, 1978).

14. Luzuriaga & Zuvekas (1983:167) maintain that, for the sierra and coast taken together, "(b)y the end of 1978 a total of 479,733 hectares (still only 7% of the land in farms in 1974) had been re-distributed to 57,372 beneficiary families...".

15. This process was reinforced in fact by an 'agrarian development law' passed in 1979. The main purpose of this law was to "increase production and the productivity of the agricultural/animal husbandry sector in an accelerated and continual way, to satisfy the food requirements of the Ecuadorian population, to produce exportable surpluses and to provide raw materials for national industry" (Título 1, Artículo 1b). See Barsky (1984) for an analysis of this Law.

marketing (bypassing the intermediaries) in order to feed an ever-increasing number of urban consumers. Since offering land to precaristas also helped to contain a potentially revolutionary peasantry, it is not surprising that land redistribution became an important part of the programme as well, especially since transforming tenants into landowners also had the potential of creating a middle class (thereby further increasing demands for industrial products).

On the other hand, however, we know that the penetration of commodity relations into agriculture can follow different paths and take different forms, depending on existing conditions in specific cases (Goodman & Redclift 1981). Now that we have at hand a general appraisal of the agrarian reform programme, the purpose of the next section is to document the specific 'path' which commoditization has taken in coastal agriculture and to show the extent to which this 'path' has transformed gender and class relations in the countryside.

Commodity Relations in Coastal Agriculture

The process of commoditization in agriculture must be understood with reference to both circulation and production, to the exchange as well as the production of commodities. I begin my discussion of commoditization with an examination of the circulation of different commodities. Then I examine commodity

production by considering separately the different sets of relationships important to the reproduction of the farm/household unit (specifically land, credit, technology and labour), noting both the extent to which these factors of production have been modified by the agrarian reform's 'development package' and the effect of these commodity forms on the texture of gender and class relations in the countryside. Here, we will be particularly interested in evaluating the contradictory effects of commoditization. For example, we will see that while women have become more marginalized from agricultural production, they have maintained a certain degree of power through their control of non-commoditized networks essential to the reproduction of the household. Similarly, while there has been an increased differentiation[16] between rural households, certain features of the market have drawn these same households together through an emphasis on family ties.

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16. I should note here that when I speak of differentiation I am not speaking of variations in the economic status of farmers (e.g., poor, middle, rich). Although these are 'starting-points' for differentiation (Lenin 1964), I am concerned rather with the process whereby farm producers are transformed into two separate social classes, one class owning the means of production and hiring wage labour, and the other class with only its labour power to sell. Lenin's position is that commodity penetration into the cycle of household reproduction allows for a process of accumulation, which in turn leads to differentiation. As small producers ('kulaks') produce more commodities and as landless labourers (as well as 'allotment holders') rely more on the market for basic items of consumption, commoditization increases still further, leading to the expansion of a home market.

The Circulation of Commodities

An important indicator of commoditization is that agricultural products are being sold on the market rather than consumed. As mentioned above, one of the most important objectives of the agrarian reform programme was to revitalize agricultural production to feed the country's urban population. Although it is difficult to discern in the statistical data, Luzuriaga & Zuvekas (1983) argue that there is a general trend in the country as a whole for farmers, in their need for immediate cash, to sell more and consume less of their harvests. This was certainly confirmed in my own work (in rural Vinces, Los Ríos).

Perhaps not surprisingly (given what Marx [1977:801] says about the uneven penetration of capital in agriculture), certain products have become more fully integrated into the market than others. For example, one branch of production in which capital has become important is beef ranching, 90% of beef ranches being located on the coast (World Bank 1979). According to a recent World Bank study, the commercialization of beef cattle in the country has intensified because "strong demands began to strengthen prices" (p.145). Given the high prices obtained for

beef,[17] the relatively easy credit extended by the Banco Nacional de Fomento (BNF) for livestock production and the low investment in labour costs in such production, it is not difficult to understand why many large landowners on the coast have specialized in cattle ranching over and above other types of agricultural products.[18]

However, it is most important for us to look at the circulation of rice, since it was clearly this product in which the agrarian reform programme was most interested. Given the control of millowners and merchants over the rice market in the 1960s, it was clear that the revitalization of agricultural production could not take place without some state intervention in the marketing system. Yet, throughout the agrarian reform period of the early 1970s, the Ecuadorian state took a fairly low profile in the area of marketing.[19] The government finally set

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17. According to an article in the Guayaquil newspaper, El Universo, the rate of profit in the beef industry is phenomenal. Ganaderos tend to sell their cattle to intermediaries for 24 to 30 sucres a pound 'en canal'. The intermediaries sell the meat for more than 34 sucres a pound, but they can also sell the leather and by-products. The consumer in Guayaquil buys this meat for 50 to 60 sucres (with bones) or up to 110 sucres a pound for lomo fino. The profit made in the difference between what the producer is paid and what the consumer must pay amounts to more than 4,000 sucres per head of cattle, "without adding the possibility of speculative prices" (1982:8).

18. A similar argument can be made for the production of poultry and pork.

19. Why this was the case is unclear; it is likely that the elected government was reluctant to directly interfere because of pressure from large landowners.

the prices which rice mills were to pay direct producers in 1972, but it was not until 1975, when ENAC (the National Marketing Board) was created, that the state began to have a direct and substantial control over the organization of rice marketing.

Before this time, a private marketing board called FENACOOPARR (National Federation of Rice Cooperatives) bought much of the rice from the cooperatives formed by the agrarian reform programme. Almost 90% of the rice sold by FENACOOPARR went to the government, but this was only about 20% of the rice sold in Guayaquil, the region's largest rice market. In 1974, other sources of Guayaquil's rice consumption in the mid-'70s were the state rice-mill, Piladora 'Modelo', (24%), other (private) mills (28.5%), and dealers or intermediaries (28.5%). Given these figures, it was clear that there was plenty of room for state expansion in the marketing of the product. By the next year, 1975, ENAC bought and processed almost 70% of the rice produced in the region.[20]

Yet the formation of ENAC has in many ways been more favourable to the merchants than to the small farmer. This is not something which I can detail here (see Phillips 1985), but it should be recognized that there are many constraints placed on small farmers which do not allow them to buy and sell freely in the product market and which restrict their direct access to

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20. The figures in this paragraph are taken from Redclift (1978).

ENAC. Here there are restrictions both on the basis of class and gender. In the case of the latter it is the men who do the marketing of products in town and control household expenditures (doing the grocery shopping for the household, etc.); the activities of rural women are restricted considerably by ideologies stipulating that they should not, for example, andar sola (walk alone). Yet many men are also restricted in their access to ENAC's higher prices because of long-term debts to local merchants, their inability to get bank loans and their need for immediate cash.

This situation has tended to increase the interdependence of smallholders, agricultural labourers and landowner/merchants within the countryside. This interdependence is expressed in kin terms - "we are all family here" - in a way which underplays the real economic differences between such people. Two very important ways in which rural people strengthen such networks is by expanding the relations which can be considered 'family' through plural unions and compadrazgo (the godparenthood system).

What is quite obvious in many areas of the coast is that there exists a certain 'backwardness' in the circulation of commodities. This 'backwardness' has encouraged the investment of any capital which is accumulated in agriculture, not back into agriculture itself but into other activities such as transport and merchant activities which yield better rates of return (cf.

Bernstein 1979). This helps to explain for example the enthusiasm with which many of the petty bourgeoisie in rural coastal areas have entered the transportation business. To clarify why and how this 'backwardness' occurs, however, we must now turn to the process of commoditization within the reproduction of farm units themselves.

Production of Commodities and Reproduction of the Farm Unit

A discussion of the commoditization of agriculture at the local level involves a consideration of the kinds of factors of production which are essential to the daily and generational reproduction of the farm/household unit. However, the process whereby the reproduction of farm units becomes commoditized is a variable, uneven and complicated one. Thus, some aspects of the reproduction of the farm unit may be mediated by market relations while others may not. I appraise this situation for households in rural Vinces,[21] by looking specifically at land, technological inputs, credit, and labour - all factors which were to be mobilized (at least to some extent) through the agrarian

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21. This study was undertaken between 1980 and 1982 and was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The information here is based on participant observation, a survey of 106 households and 7 detailed case studies.

reform programme.

LAND

Land is not a 'given' in agricultural production. The social relations linked to access to land must be reproduced just as much as relations linked to obtaining credit, attracting labour to the farm unit, etc. In rural Vinces, these relations were transformed quite dramatically by the agrarian reform programme. With the threat of the reforms, many landlords threw renters off their land or tried to sell portions of their land on the open market in an attempt to avoid expropriation. Some were successful, but many owners of haciendas in the Vinces area lived elsewhere and in such cases the precaristas were able to organize themselves and apply to IERAC for expropriation.

Part of the 'development package' in the agrarian reform programme was that IERAC was to mediate between landowners and the precaristas in the transfer of land. The institute was responsible for identifying the quality and quantity of land on which the precaristas had been working (the final price being based on land values according to DNAC, the national cadastral office) and ensuring that the money paid by the precaristas for the land was transferred to the previous landowner.[22]

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22. AID officials had determined that coastal landowners were actually willing to sell land by that time in order to invest in more liquid assets (Blankstein & Zuvekas 1973). However, in the case of Vinces, many landlords were willing to sell land, but

Thus, although the above caveat concerning the limited degree to which the agrarian reform program actually re-distributed land should be heeded, the reform did enable some landless labourers to become landed and this did have an effect on social relations in the countryside.

First, there are indications that land is now being held for speculative rather than agricultural purposes. For example, there are a number of large landowners who have divided their haciendas located close to town into solares (house plots) and are selling them at fairly high prices ($6,000 to $10,000 sucres).[23] Second, it does appear that a greater percentage of the rural population in the area must survive on very small plots of land, most relying heavily on the market for basic items of consumption. Many of these minifundistas (a term usually reserved for the sierran situation) can be found within the cooperatives themselves. Many socios are not able to survive solely on the plot of land they receive (often only 2-3 cuadras) and thus are forced to work outside the cooperative.

However, it should also be noted that, while changes in the land tenure pattern are related to a predominance of wage labour in the countryside, access to land in this area is not totally mediated by commodity relations. First, access to land is

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objected to selling it to their workers; thus, struggles over expropriation were far from uncommon.

23. $1.00 (Am.) = 40 sucres (1982).

mediated by the concept of the 'gendered person' (cf.Hirschon 1984). Women's compromisos (mates)[24] or brothers are much more likely to be controlling landed property than the women themselves, even though legally women have equal rights with men in concerns of inheritance. The reproduction of the farm unit itself is not independent of this factor since, without the marginalization of women from the land, fragmentation through inheritance would be much more of a serious problem than it is today. Far from alleviating this problem, the implementation of cooperatives has intensified the situation since in practice, if not in theory, only males inherit socio-ship.

A second important point is that many cooperatives in the area do not legally 'own' their land, but simply have control over its production. This is primarily because the state has fairly strict rules about land payments and production levels for individual cooperatives, and those cooperatives which are not capable of fulfilling them do not receive title. Thus, many socios are left in a position not entirely dissimilar to their previous position as precaristas, but now with the state as landlord and controller of the product market (cf. Zaldivar 1974).

Third, there is a local practice of 'giving away' small

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24. Compromisos may refer to publicly-recognized 'free unions' (marriage is not common in this area) or to women's mates in such unions.

plots of land, often on the basis of kinship ties. Those who have access to land by virtue of this phenomenon most often have unwritten labour obligations to the 'donor' and this in itself has become an important part of the reproduction of the farm/household. For example, Margarita was given a solar by a landowner while she worked as a cook for him and now that she is too old to do this, her two sons work for the landowner on a semi-permanent basis. A different example is that of Juanita, whose landowning grandfather offers a small plot of rice land free of charge to Juanita's landless compromiso, while Juanita regularly collects herbs and medicine for her grandfather's failing health. Women's networks - particularly their control over kin ties which involve the obligation to 'help' - become an important contribution to the reproduction of rural households in this respect.

Finally, it is important to note how labour in the area has attempted to maintain its hold over land, no matter how small in size the land may be. It is not only that these rural people recognize that without any land at all they will have nothing but their labour power to sell and that such access to land provides a buffer from a total dependence on commoditized relations. They also know that having a plot of land implies some support from others, especially given the existence of the family network in which they are embedded. This in itself implies that the social relations of landed property are not entirely commoditized.

TECHNICAL INPUTS

A second aspect of the 'development package' of the agrarian reform programme has been an emphasis on increased yields in agriculture. In the 1970 Decree it was assumed that the precarista-cum-landowner knew little about 'efficient' farming and thus agricultural technicians were sent to the cooperatives to draw up production plans which would enable the new landowners to pay for the land within ten years. Cooperatives had to have such a 'plan' in order to move from a 'pre-cooperative' to a full cooperative stage in the government's eyes.

In the Vinces area these plans involve a very detailed examination of exactly what the cooperative can grow, how much it can grow and what kind of 'profit' can be turned at the end of each year. Also, INIAP (the National Institute for Agricultural Research) has done some experimentation with new types of rice seeds, fertilizer and insecticides to aid agricultural production within cooperatives. These inputs have been made available to the (male-controlled) Union of Cooperatives (UNOCAVB) in Vinces. This new technology was also the raison d'être for the experimental farm which was set up in the area 10 years ago. Today this farm, run by the University of Guayaquil and at least partly funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, even uses sprinkling systems for its cultivation of corn and rice. Although this display has not encouraged many farmers in the area to purchase such systems, it does prompt a certain amount of

admiration by the locals who never fail to comment on the 'beauty' of the crops when they pass by.

Yet, the attempt to increase the use of technological inputs has had uneven results in the Vinces area. This is because although the state has made progress in increasing production,[25] not all farmers can invest in production to the same extent. Thus, while almost all farmers (both within and outside of cooperatives) now buy insecticide for their crops and experiment with rice seeds to evaluate differences in yields and labour input, only the larger landowner can afford large expenditures such as renting corn grinding machines or tractors to till the soil.

It is important to note here that the widespread use of insecticide (the application of which is considered 'men's work') has displaced the labour of women, who previously worked as human 'scarecrows' in the fields. Also, it is women's work of degraining corn by hand which is being replaced by the introduction of corn grinding machines.

CREDIT

Given the above purchases of insecticide, seeds, etc., money is clearly necessary in the agricultural production cycle. The

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25. For example, rice yields per hectare have more than doubled in Canton Vinces since 1954.

extension of credit was a third aspect of the 'development package' of the programme. With the 1970 Decrees, the role of the BNF had been expanded considerably. Credit authorized by the BNF increased by almost 300% between 1973 and 1974 alone (Redclift 1978).[26] This was also the period when Ecuador became a member of OPEC (1973) and the then President Rodriguez Lara spoke of 'la siembra del petroleo', indicating the reinvestment of oil revenues into agriculture (Redclift 1978). However, this expansion did not last long and by 1975, with the foreign debt increasing, we find the head of the BNF admitting that agricultural loans would have to be reduced because of difficulties in recuperating them and because the bank "was losing control over its operations" (Redclift 1978:25).[27] The negative effects of such a policy can be seen in the fact that, according to a Vinces bank manager, "muy pocos" loans are granted to cooperatives and smallholders in the area; the bank views most of these farmers as high credit risks. On the other hand, I knew of no rural women who had bank loans.

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26. Even so, the majority of credit went to those units of production specializing in livestock (Griffin 1976).

27. It is interesting, in this respect, that a study undertaken by the World Bank (1979) points out that the BNF was experiencing a 'loans problem', with 17.5% of its loan portfolio in arrears - 47% of those being overdue for more than a year. Thereafter it appears that pressure was placed on the BNF to become more efficient and selective in its credit extension. The World Bank indicates that the problems of the BNF have been "identified with the help of outside consultants" (ibid:110) and that the BNF is now trying to reduce its proportion of overdue loans.

Yet the fact is that loans from the BNF tie producers to certain types of agriculture. Although this can be viewed as an attempt by the state to intervene further in the conditions of agriculture production, it is something which most farmers in the area are not willing to tolerate. When the bank manager told me that these farmers cannot be relied upon to spend their credit on the crops they are 'supposed' to grow, he was indicating the degree to which these producers attempt to resist this intereference.

The policy of the bank to lend only to low credit risks also helps to explain the reliance of rural Vinceños for credit on merchants/usurers who have fewer claims on the form which production should take. The extent to which the rural population is indebted to town merchants is quite extraordinary. The owner of one almacén (hardware store) told me in 1982 that rural people in the area owed the store from 5 to 6 million sucres. However, it is also important to note that rural Vinceños prefer to borrow money from 'family' because land is much less likely to be alienated from them if a debt cannot be paid. This strategy is effective in resisting more direct control by merchant capital (cf. Roseberry 1978) and helps to explain why those people living in the area are most likely to sell their crops to a merchant with whom they also have kinship connections.

LABOUR

A frequent corollory of more capital intensive activities in agriculture is rural unemployment and/or high migration levels. Of course, the mobilization of labour - the separation of labourers from subsistence production - was an important part of the reform's objectives. Unfortunately, however, the extent of unemployment on the coast does not appear in the statistical data because censuses focus on farm units, not individuals. There are in fact no reliable studies on the Ecuadorian employment situation (see Luzuriaga & Zuvekas 1983 for an indication of just how unreliable such studies are in Ecuador); in any case, such data tend to have strong gender biases in terms of who is and who is not defined as part of the 'economically active population'. However, it is quite clear from Guayaquil's burgeoning population that migration from the countryside continues (women primarily for domestic employment and men for construction and factory work) and that this migration is closely tied to employment changes in the rural sectors of the country (Middleton 1981).

However, because a sufficient number of urban employment opportunities do not exist to absorb this flood from the countryside, we also find a surplus of labour in the countryside. This can be seen in the large number of rural casual labourers (particulares). Many men in rural Vinces claim that they do not work at all, when what they in fact do is take up temporary jobs whenever and wherever they become available - a

couple of hours of harvesting here, a small well-building project there. We also find that women who live in these kinds of households do anything they can to bring in supplementary income or consumption goods. Two 'unmentionable', but quite widespread, activities are the washing of clothes for others (for pay) and scavenging for food and firewood. Once again, a strong family network is the key in such activities, both for access to other people's land for scavenging purposes and for information concerning employment. Strategies such as expanding one's 'family' (and, thus, one's support base) by forming compadre relationships and plural unions help to buffer these rural househholds from complete dependence on the market. However, it should be recognized that these strategies also help to keep rural wages low and maintain a reliable labour force for larger landowners in the area.

There is no doubt that cooperatives themselves have had an influence on the labour market in the rural Vinces area. First of all, a few of the larger cooperatives hire wage labourers. Second, cooperative unions provide political jobs to a number of ex-precaristas. These jobs tend to be monopolized by a small group of men who rent out their cooperative land to family members or friends. Third, because the benefits of belonging to a cooperative often appear to be quite limited, many members perceive themselves to be little more than wage workers, irrespective of whether or not they are technically landowners.

On the other hand it should be noted that the household units within all of these cooperatives are only partially integrated into the wage labour market. Significantly enough, that part is male. This is not surprising given that a gender-differentiated labour force is particularly useful within the context of a 'reproduction squeeze',[28] where access to credit and product markets is limited, but one must sell more (and thus produce more) in order to survive. A division on the basis of gender (reinforced by ideologies of motherhood and family 'responsibilities') has helped to lower costs of production within farm units because women's labour can be intensified without their demanding increased remuneration in the form of money. Thus, while change in some aspects of the reproduction cycle of farm units in rural Vinces, e.g., the use of technological inputs such as insecticide, has displaced the labour of women, other changes have helped to extend and intensify their labour. This fact alone indicates that the question of 'gender' and 'development' is a far from simple one.

Social Differentiation and Political Struggle

In the previous section we saw that at the level of the

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28. This is Bernstein's (1979) term for the process whereby the farm unit experiences increasing costs of production at the same time that it experiences decreasing returns to labour.

rural household there are clear differences in who can get bank credit, who can rent tractors, and who has access to a sufficient amount of land for household reproduction. (Significantly, there has been both a gender and class component here). We have also seen that greater yields are being obtained by farmers in the area (through technological inputs as well as increased labour extraction) and that harvests are more likely to be sold as commodities than consumed by the farm unit. Likewise, although most people in the area do have access to some land, basic items are often purchased.

Yet from what we have seen throughout this paper we cannot in any way say that households in rural Vinces have reached the <u>end point</u> of commoditization. We need only recall the emphasis on family ties to see that such is not the case in rural Vinces, if indeed it is the case anywhere in rural Ecuador. In rural Vinces, commodity relations clearly are a part of the cycle of reproduction of farm units, but this involves a <u>limited</u> differentiation.

This point leads directly into our consideration of the role of labour in the process of commoditization outlined above. Specifically, what can a 'limited' differentiation tell us about the struggles of rural men and women in coastal Ecuador? To answer this question, it is worth considering Bernstein's (1979) argument. Bernstein contends, for the case of Africa, that there is a constant tension in agriculture between labour's struggle to

maintain some control over the means of production and capital's attempt to determine the conditions of production. It seems to me that this is precisely what is illustrated in the above changes in the reproduction of the farm/household unit in rural Vincea. It is by no means a coincidence that it is within the circuit of merchant capital that we have identified a certain 'backwardness', for it is here that the attempts of labour to resist control by the state have been most successful, i.e., local producers can rely on non-commoditized (family) ties for access to credit. Furthermore, we cannot say that the penetration of <u>productive</u> capital has been entirely successful in regulating labour. This is primarily because a part of the means of production (land) still remains within the <u>control of labour</u>. This in itself allows labourers a certain degree of freedom to supervise <u>themselves</u> to meet the demands of 'reproduction squeezes' which occur because of falling relative prices, etc.

However, essential to a discussion concerning labour's resistance to a complete control by productive capital is the fact that in rural Vincea the labourers' ability to supervise 'themselves' takes the very specific form of supervising 'women'. For it is primarily <u>men</u> who have control over this aspect of production and, reinforced by non-economic forms of coercion such as motherhood, it is the labour of women in particular which can be regulated and extended to meet increasing demands on the farm/household.

Once we recognize that the struggles of rural labour play an important part in the particular character of the process of commoditization, we can begin to explain one other important feature of the agrarian structure: the emphasis on family ties. We have found that these ties bind together rural households which have differentiated access to valued resources such as land and technological inputs. Without such ties many <u>particulares</u> would not survive in the countryside, and many a farm would be forced into capitalist relations of production when, given the unpredictable economic climate, such a move would not seem wise. Rather than considering this situation as one of 'hidden unemployment' (as does Mintz, 1974), we can turn the table around, so to speak, and analyze it as an attempt on the part of producers to maintain some control over the production process. Specifically, the struggles of producers to deal with the 'reproduction squeeze' in rural Vinces has involved an extraction of surpluses from rural labour, but in a way which always stops just short of completely separating the producer from the means of production (thus, the phenomenon of 'giving away' land) or reproducing one's farm unit through the purchase of wage labour alone (given extra-economic obligations as 'kin').

However, while such relations are clearly important survival strategies for the rural population, they also have serious political implications. Briefly I will identify only two here. First of all, I would argue that it is precisely the above situation which discourages rural labourers from expressing their

day-to-day problems as those of class struggle. Thus, for example, the normal response to questions about exploitation within the countryside is that 'we are all family here', and that the problem is the 'government' or the large landowers with whom one has few direct contacts. In rural Vinces, it is only the egoistas (the very large landowners) who can flatly state a class position and not fear the consequences.

Secondly, I have argued that an important dimension to 'women's work' is that of maintaining the very non-commoditized ties which place limits on the formation of agrarian capital. While it is clear that women are not entirely isolated from one another in separate households dominated by men, the kinds of networks which bind women together have the same double edge as 'family' relations. They are important to the survival of the household - and give women a certain degree of power in this respect - but insofar as these relations are shot through with different class interests, they undercut the overt and direct expression by women of their oppression as women.

This is not to say that women do not struggle with their oppression, but that such struggles tend to be very individualized. Since women's struggles are intricately tied into the personal ties in which they are embedded, problems are defined, not in terms of male control over resources, for example, but in terms of Marisol's 'bad luck' of having a domineering compromiso, Patricia's unfortunate situation of being

abandoned for another woman, etc. Within this framework women may struggle with such problems in various ways, e.g., returning to live with their mothers until their compromisos agree to be more reasonable, bearing another child to strengthen their position vis-à-vis a 'wandering' compromiso,[29] and setting up their own negocios in small-scale pig or chicken businesses in order to offset their financial dependence on men.

Conclusions

In this paper I have detailed transformations in the coastal agrarian sector to clarify how the experiences of the rural population are hooked into the larger, contradictory processes of the region as a whole. Now, for example, we have a much clearer idea of the historical underpinnings to the division of labour by sex, the kind of agrarian reform programme that the Ecuadorian state had hoped to implement and the extent to which the problem of 'gender and development' is much more complicated than a question of 'land' alone.

By disaggregating the relations of reproduction of the rural household it was possible to show that, not unlike other Latin

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29. In this respect it is interesting that fertility on the coast is much higher than in the sierra (Scrimshaw 1981). Women in my study had an average of 6.6 children. This, despite an intensification in government 'family planning' schemes since the sixties.

American countries, the process of commoditization in rural coastal Ecuador has been (and still is) an uneven and incomplete one. We have seen that this is partly because of the role of the state in promoting an uneven development in the production and exchange of agricultural commodities (promoting commoditization in production while attempting to control the distribution of certain products for urban consumption), partly because the commoditization of agriculture may allow at least some control by producers over the means of production, and partly because of the resistance of rural labour to increasing control over agriculture. We have also seen that gender differentiation is not simply a by-product but an integral part of this process. This often has unfortunate consequences for women, but it is also clear that women struggle with this situation, and that these struggles do have some impact on the specific forms that larger social and economic forces can take at the local level.

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