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Falling Through the Cracks: Invisibility and Rural Women in Ecuador's Comunas

A Thesis in Women's and Gender Studies

and International Relations

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Abstract

When laws and development programs are written in a "gender-neutral" fashion women are always left out of the conversation, Ecuador's communal land system is no exception. In this thesis it is argued the comuna structure contributes to the invisibilization of non-indigenous rural women living in Ecuador's communal lands. Overlooked by the government, development programs, and academic research alike, the comuneras remain invisible in theory and in reality; the thesis is a first step in bringing the women into the literature. Through exploring the history and context of Ecuador's Ley de Régimen y Organización de las Comunas as well as the genealogy of feminist theories of development, the thesis highlights the ways in which the comuna structure invisibilizes and silences non-indigenous rural women. Based on participant observation and interviews with Ecuador's comuneras in the Santa Elena Peninsula, the thesis exposes a gap in the existing literature, proposes themes to be explored in future research on Ecuador's comunas, and makes a case for a participatory approach in feminist development theory.

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Introduction

It is a common thought experiment in Women's and Gender Studies to describe something we know very well, such as gender, as we would to an alien that just arrived to our world. We imagine what it is like to explain a society with different rules and structures and we question things we take for granted. During my visit in Ecuador in the summer of 2019, I had the opportunity to be the alien in the thought experiment. Prior to my arrival to Ecuador, I had no idea that communal lands existed in the country, and my understanding of the political structure in which people lived depended on my asking the right questions. I asked questions to the women who live and work in these communal lands, I asked questions to government officials at the Province level who are expected to work with the communal lands, and I asked questions to my key informants—women who had grown in a comuna but immigrated to the cities. They all had a different answer for me. When I returned to school, ready to embark on a research project on the communal land structure in Ecuador, I found yet another, completely different, answer to the same question. What are comunas? Most importantly, as I attempted to read up on Ecuador's history, Ecuador's comunas, and Ecuador's women, I found a significant gap in the research: the women that I had spent two weeks interacting with, were nowhere to be found. Non-indigenous rural women are completely non-existent in literature about Ecuador. This thesis is first and foremost a recognition that these women exist, their lives matter, and they deserve to be a part of the conversation.

In Santa Elena, a province on the southwest coast of Ecuador, the majority of the population lives in comunas—areas where the occupants hold collective rights to the land and have autonomous governments. Thousands of women live in rural comunas across the country; they participate in monthly comuna meetings, own shops, and work the land. Like the majority of the people currently inhabiting Santa Elena's comunas, the women I interviewed and interacted with identify as mestizas and have no association with indigenous identities. I spent three weeks in Ecuador's comunas, talking to different women and observing their daily lives. The conversations I had with them guide this thesis.

When I first arrived in Ecuador, I arrived with the intention of writing a thesis on community-based ecotourism. I set out to observe the roles of women in El Azúcar, a comuna that had sold most of its land to foreign and national industrial agriculture companies, so I could compare them to the roles of women living in Dos Mangas, a successful ecotourism venture in which women were known for their beautiful handcrafts. These observations were to inform the project proposal to begin an ecotourism venture in Las Balsas. The vision for this project was to create a venture in which women were empowered by the ecotourism industry and the venture benefited from the women's contributions. I was aiming to prove community-based ecotourism was better off when women had leadership roles; having read about what community-based ecotourism could do for women, I was interested in discovering what women could do for ecotourism—my interview questions were designed to obtain this information as well. My project partner, Abigail Mullen, and I spent two days visiting all the handcraft shops

in Dos Mangas, talking to the women to learn more about their lives and their perception of tourism. My questions revolved around what they thought ecotourism was, what they believed the role of women should be in a successful ecotourism venture, and what the government's role should be. Soon after starting my interviews, I realized these were not the questions I wanted to ask nor the questions that the women could answer. The transcripts on *Appendix 2* show these conversations. Some interviews took over twenty minutes in which we spoke about their crafts and their lives in the comunas. Some other were shorter, with the women accepting to interview with us but giving us monosyllabic responses or changing their mind halfway through the interview, telling us they were either happy to talk to us if we stopped recording or telling me I could not use their interviews in my thesis anymore. Regardless of the outcome of the interview, the takeaway was always the same: the women I talked to did not think of themselves as having a role in ecotourism; they thought of tourism as something that happened *to* them instead of something they make happen. Most of the women described tourism as something the visitors brought with them, the tourists (particularly international tourists) were the active participants of tourism according to their perspective. The narrative that prevailed in my conversation with both women and the tour guides in Dos Mangas was that people in Dos Mangas had never cared about the environment until the government and some foreign tourists had taught them to appreciate the beauty of their forest, waterfalls, and natural pools. Again and again, the people from the comuna would say foreign visitors love nature and that is why they must conserve it. In no moment did they talk about having a connection or an attachment to nature, but they saw it as the driving

force behind the tourists visits. Just as they do not have a relationship to nature (the way indigenous people do), the handcrafts they do are also not endogenous to their region or at all associated to their identity. Every person I talked to told me it had been the government that taught the women and men of Dos Mangas how to make crafts with tagua and paja toquilla to promote commerce in the comunas.

An important finding of my interviews came from asking the women what they thought their roles were in the tourism industry of Dos Mangas, they only gave individual answers. The abandoned Asociación de Mujeres Artesanas (See Appendix 2, Interview 4) is physical example of how Dos Mangas' women do not see their identity as women as a political one, or one to group themselves around. Not only did my interviewees describe their role as passive, but they did not see themselves as having a role in tourism *as women.* This became clear to me later on as I did research on Ecuadorian women, all of the literature I found focused on either urban women who were part of feminist activist groups or organized as women for causes such as the right to vote, or indigenous women who organized to fight together for indigenous rights. There was no mention of non-indigenous rural women, and I believe part of it is because womanhood was not a political, or economic, identity for them. However, almost all of the interviewees recognized the benefits of tourism to their status as women: it gives them an occupation, it gave them money to educate and feed their children.

Interview after interview, I could see my original idea for a thesis falling apart. I did not have an argument in favor for women's participation in ecotourism; in fact, I was skeptical of whether or not tourism was empowering to the comuneras (women living in

comunas). And after visiting Los Ceibitos, the comuna in which we were hoping to start a new ecotourism venture, I lost hope of having a women-led project. The women in Los Ceibitos would not talk to us without their husbands present, and, when they did talk, they constantly looked over their shoulder as if waiting for their husband's permission to share their opinion with us. As I lost faith on writing a thesis on women-led community-based ecotourism, I gained interest in the comuna structure and the political organization of the areas where I was staying. I was fascinated by the fact that large groups of people without a shared ethnic identity had achieved communal rights to land and political independence from the national government.

I was in rural areas for the best part of my three weeks in Ecuador, and my access to internet connection was little to none, so I was left to learn about the comunas through my conversation with comuneros and government officials. This gave me a unique and privileged understanding of the system from within. If I had gone to Ecuador knowing that I was writing a thesis on comunas, I would have read the Ecuadorian Constitution and all formal information on how structure works prior to my trip, only to be surprised once I saw the comunas for myself. What is written on paper is not what is lived every day by these women. The literature on Ecuador's comunas and communal indigenous lands in Latin America is not the only one that fails to accurately understand the lives of women like the Dos Mangas comuneras. Poor rural women in Ecuador are completely missing from the literature on women's rights and women's organizing, as well as from the spheres of activism and development planning. Poor rural women in Ecuador simply do not check off the necessary boxes to be written about: they are not indigenous, they

are not organized politically as women, and they do not live in urban centers. In other words, poor rural women in Ecuador have fallen through the cracks.

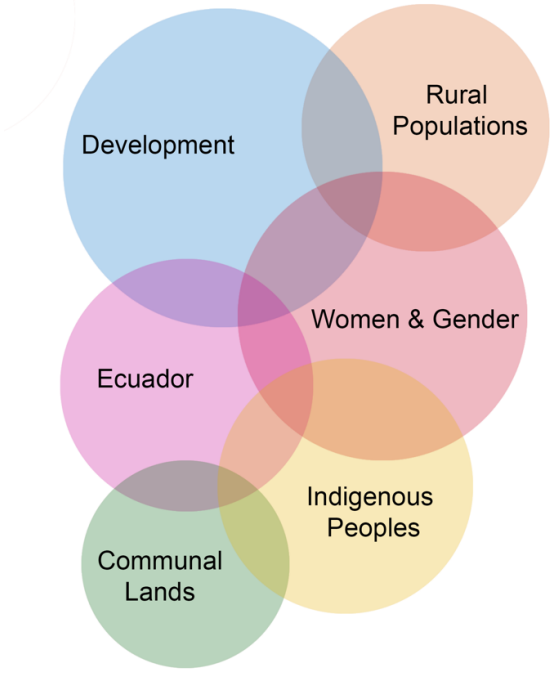

Figure 1. *State of the Literature on Ecuador's Women and Communal Rights*

My aim in this thesis is not only to point out the areas in which poor rural women living in Ecuador's comunas are overlooked in the existing literature about Ecuadorian women and Ecuador's comunas, but also to discuss how the comuna structure contributes to the invisibilization of poor rural women. To accomplish this, I begin by a discussion of invisibility, as well as the origins of the comuna structure in Ecuador's law and history in Chapter 1. I continue in Chapter 2 with a narration of my time in Ecuador, my observations about the themes and questions found in the lives of the women I interacted with, as well as the different processes that contribute to the invisibilization of these

women in the literature. Finally, in Chapter 3 I do a reading of feminist theories of development in light of my findings about poor rural women in Ecuador's comunas, ending with a proposal of what I believe is an effective framework to bring the women back to the literature and into development planning.

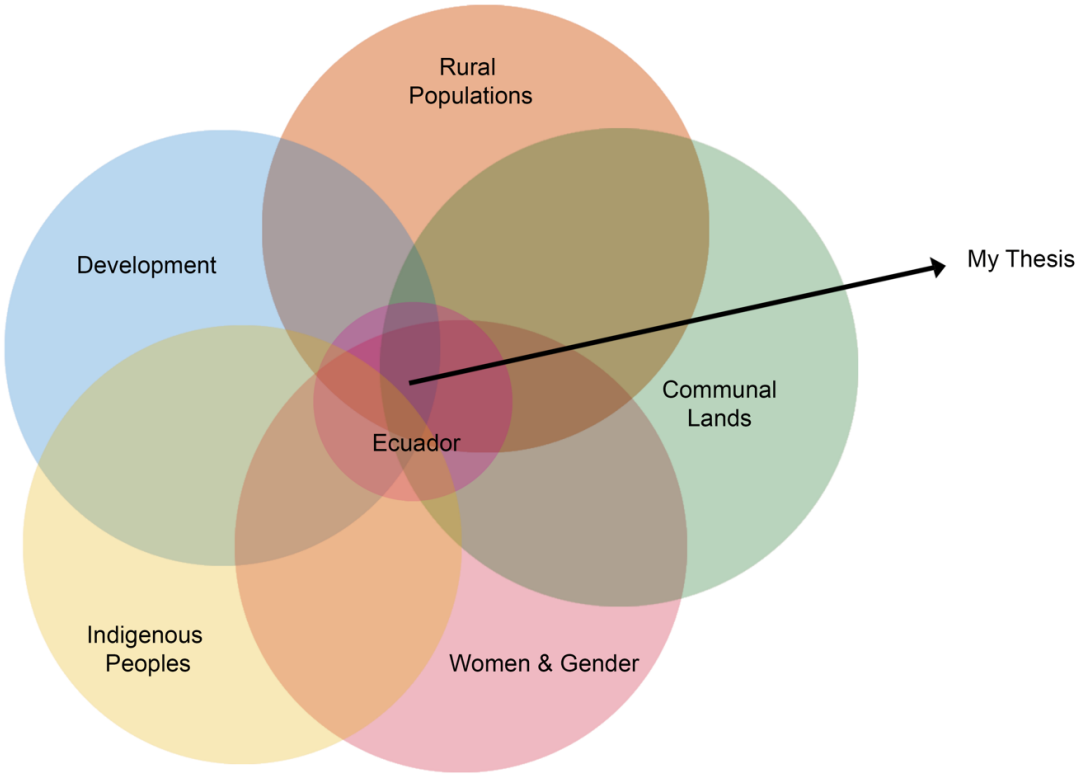

Figure 2. *Locating my Thesis in the Literature*

Chapter 1. Ecuador and the Comuna Structure

My experience in Ecuador led me, somewhat unexpectedly, to investigate the comuna structure and its implications for non-indigenous women living in them. In this chapter, I define that structure by first looking at the literature on collective land rights in Latin America and then historicizing the origins of La Ley de las Comunas. Most importantly, in this chapter I will outline the theory of invisibility that I will use to examine the lives of non-indigenous rural women in Ecuador's comunas.

The region of Ecuador I chose as my case study is the Santa Elena Province. Located on the southwest coast, the peninsula is one of Ecuador's 24 provinces. During my fieldwork in Ecuador I spent most of my time in Santa Elena; the interviews and conversations I had with comuneras were all conducted in this area. Without knowing, I ended in the perfect case study to analyze and question the comuna structure in today's Ecuador.

Santa Elena has a land area of 3,762.8 km^2. The province is divided in three "cantones": Santa Elena (3,668.9 km^2), Salinas (68.7 km^2), and La Libertad (25.3 km^2) (Santa Elena Gob, 2019). It is estimated that 80 percent of the land area in Santa Elena belongs to the comunas (Tuaza and Sáenz 2014). According to the "Santa Elena Road and Travel Map" distributed by the Prefectura—the Provincial level of government—there are 68 comunas in Santa Elena, although that fact is not confirmed or listed on any other government sites that I have been able to find. There is an organization called La Federación de las Comunas, which oversees all communal lands and to which fees are

due every year, however this organization does not have a website or contact information available online. This is one of the many ways in which the lives of those living in comunas are made invisible by virtue of the system.

The comuna structure in Ecuador continues to be a severely understudied subject, and most of the information about comuna sizes and population numbers comes from student theses and dissertations rather than peer-reviewed journals. The leading expert on the topic, Silvia Álvarez, an anthropologist working in Ecuador, has produced an extensive bibliography on Ecuador's comunas, focusing mostly on the historical continuity of coastal Ecuador's communal lands (Álvarez 2002a, 2017). The anthropologist defines comunas as "stable sociopolitical units, identifiable by their association with a territory over which there are exclusive rights and a nuclear settlement, of which you can be a part of through social relations, fundamentally of kinship" (Álvarez 2002, 11). This definition is complex, but it encapsulates reality in a better way than Ecuador's current constitution, ratified in 2008, in which comunas are defined in Article 60 as "[territories] with communal property rights to land, as a form of ancestral territorial organization" (Constitución 2008, 27)In many ways, it is perhaps easier to conceptualize comunas by reviewing the rights given to them under the most recent version of Ecuador's laws (Appendix 1), such as full access to human and collective rights, the right not to pay taxes, and the right to develop their own forms of social and political organization.

In addition to there being scarce official information on the status of comunas (how many there are, their land areas, their populations, etc.) available to the public,

comunas are a controversial topic in Ecuador's recent history. Created in 1937 under La Ley de Organización y Régimen de las Comunas (Law of Comuna Organization and Regime, from now on referred to as Ley de las Comunas), the comuna structure is one of a kind by granting communal rights to land to a vast percentage of the country's population, mostly in reparation of harm done to indigenous lands and communities during colonization. In this chapter, my aim is to historicize the creation of this unique law as well as putting my Ecuador case study in the context of land reform and ownership in the Latin American region. In order to accurately incorporate the aforementioned history and context, I will begin with discussing the invisibility framework that will drive my argument on the invisibilization of non-indigenous poor rural women in the comunas.

Santa Elena's Invisible Comunas

In *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity,* anthropologist Kimbra L. Smith uses the community of Agua Blanca in the Manabí Province (located North of Santa Elena on Ecuador's coast) as an example of how the hierarchy of ethnicities in Ecuador has constructed "indigeneity [as a] liability" (Smith 2015, 97). Smith argues that various processes of oppression against indigenous peoples in Ecuador have contributed to the invisibilization and washing out of indigenous identities in coastal Ecuador. To the point that, according to Smith, the coast is considered to be home only to mestizos, erasing the identity of the indigenous groups living on the coast and leading people to believe "indigenous groups live only in the highlands or the far reaches of the Amazon basin" (Smith 2015, 12). Smith's framework

on the constructions of invisibility is helpful in understanding the situation of the poor rural populations of Santa Elena's.

In adopting Smith's theory of invisibility to talk about non-indigenous people, I believe it is important to clarify that my intention is not to erase or minimize the oppression of indigenous peoples. I recognize and condemn the fact that historically, particularly in the Americas, there have been active efforts (often times conducted by the states themselves) to erase and invisibilize indigenous identities and cultures. However, in doing research for my thesis I have come to realize that most of the literature on communal lands focuses on indigenous peoples' access to land and/or organized peasant movements, rendering poor rural unorganized women invisible to the eyes of the literature, development policies, and the world at large. Later on, as a form of conclusion for this chapter, I will adopt Smith's theory on the construction of invisibility to discuss how the comuna structure in Ecuador contributes to the invisibilization of the people, particularly the mestizos, living in Santa Elena's comunas.

Smith begins by explaining Michael Foucault's theory on the creation of dominant discourses of what is considered "normal" or the "status-quo." According to Foucault, people collectively classify others through what he calls "the gaze, a moment of pause in our visual scanning of our surroundings, a blip on our register. Anyone who does not register—anyone we perceive as 'normal'—is therefore able to remain invisible" (Smith 2015, 12). If one is to take Foucault's theory as true, then invisibility becomes a privilege, it "implies a sort of comfort conferred upon an individual by a group that perceives that individual as 'normal,' not requiring surveillance" (Smith 2015, 12-

13). Smith then argues that we ought to complicate the binary of visibility/invisibility by understanding there are different types of invisibility. In particular, Smith is interested in what she refers to negative or restrictive invisibility, a similar concept to negative freedom. Smith describes negative invisibility as

> invisibility one cannot choose to abandon and that does not grant one access to an unmarked status or the mobility it implies or even, in most cases, to a marked status that may be lower in the social hierarchy—normal's Other—but that still register within public perception (Smith 2015, 13)

Smith utilizes the concept of negative invisibility to examine the silencing of indigenous peoples in Agua Blanca, and by extension the Manabí Province. When discussing la Ley de las Comunas, Smith argues that its vague phrasing has contributed to the invisibilization and disenfranchising of indigenous groups. According to Smith, indigenous groups were incentivized by the 1960s leaders of communist-inspired social and political movements to register as a *comuna campesina* (peasant commune) rather than a *comuna indígena* (indigenous commune) (Smith 2015, 40). By choosing to leave out their indigenous identity, indigenous peoples themselves perpetuated the construction of indigeneity as a liability.

By no means do I disagree that indigenous peoples have too been disenfranchised and further oppressed by the vague phrasing of La Ley de las Comunas and the lack of accountability from the government. In this thesis, however, I aim to extend Smith's theory of invisibility to non-indigenous comuneras who live in the margins of academic literature, development policies, and Ecuador's land reforms.

Collective Land Rights in Latin America

Land reform is a broad concept, but one that is necessary to define it before examining the comuna structure in Ecuador. Furthermore, in Chapter 2, I will examine some of the literature on women's right to land, particularly in the case of communal lands. "Land reform" encompasses various laws which regulate who owns and works the land, examples include redistributive reforms of ownership rights, the establishment of collective or communal rights to land, and contractual arrangements between landowners and those who work the land (Griffin, Khan, and Ickowitz 2002, 279). In Latin America, the 20th century is commonly known for the region's indigenous movements, civil unrest, as well as land and agrarian reforms.

Following their independence from European colonial powers, the newly formed Latin American countries followed a policy of assimilation when it came to their indigenous populations. Throughout the process of creating new states and nations in Latin America "the justification for [the] strategy of eliminating native peoples as separate entities was national unity" (Roldán Ortega 2004, 1). However, in the 1960s with the height of agrarian reform, Latin America could see results in "the first important examples of recognition of indigenous land claims since the colonial era. In addition, the popular mobilization among *campesinos* [peasants] that accompanied these reforms helped strengthen the indigenous movement in many countries" (Roldán Ortega 2004, 1). In this section, I will provide some context on land reform in Latin America with an emphasis in collective land rights. To do so, I will draw from two articles that provide

useful insights into the Latin American context necessary to understand Ecuador's comunas, however each article has an important blind spot that prevents it from describing the full picture. In "Agrarian Reform and Social Movements in the Age of Globalization: Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century," Miguel Teubal (2009) focuses on peasant movements and organized struggles for land reform—there is no consideration towards people that are not politically organized yet are living under a structure of collective rights to land. Similarly, in "Models for Recognizing Indigenous Land Rights in Latin America," Roque Roldán Ortega (2004) uses indigenous rights as a framework through which to read Latin American laws in regards to communal land—there is no consideration of rural people living under the structure**.** These are but two examples of how the people living in Ecuador's comunas are rendered invisible by the literature, they fall through the cracks of what is deemed interesting as a case study on land reform. In Chapter 2 I will take this argument further by explaining how invisibility affects female comuneras more explicitly.

Teubal's analysis is based in comparing agrarian reform and social before and after neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, as defined in *Globalization and Free Trade,* is characterized by advocating for "the greatest degree of unrestricted free trade and open markets and the free flow of capital, while insisting on the most minimal government spending, regulation, taxation, and interference in the economy" (Goldstein 2010, 30). According to Teubal, although many predicted that neoliberal and modernization processes would result in the fading out of land-related struggles, the reality is that neoliberalism has instead transformed the movements as well as put them in conversation

with anti-globalization and environmentalist movements (Teubal 2009, 10-11). The 20th century movements in Latin America, Teubal argues, share three main features: first, "they were social and political struggles against a landowning oligarchy that was in control of the state;" second, peasant organizations were key actors in the struggles; and third, the agrarian reforms were implemented (for better or for worse) by the state (Teubal 2009, 11-12). Teubal makes no distinction amongst the different goals of land reform movements—collective rights to land, land tenures, etc.—nor does he compare the strategies of different actors or governments. Instead, he provides a useful overview of 20th century movements and puts them in conversation with the struggles post-neoliberal policies. According to Teubal, "the current struggle can be seen in the conflicts between landowners and peasants or rural workers and between indigenous and peasant communities and the investors or corporations that seek to evict them from their land," (Teubal 2009, 10). In other words, the fight is no longer against a landowning oligarchy but against hegemonic agribusiness models. This is an example of what I observed in Ecuador in 2019, where some comunas have been known to sell their land to national and foreign agricultural corporations leading to the people becoming salary workers in lands they used to own. In many ways, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the struggle for who owns the land remains present in Ecuador's comunas.

In addition to Smith's invisibility argument which was previously explored, when comparing different Latin American approaches to indigenous land policies, Roldán Ortega ranked Ecuador's policy as being "in progress," mostly because of the fact that La Ley de las Comunas is not exclusive for indigenous people and granted peasant

groups the right to communal lands. Additionally, in his discussion of the main problems in the recognition of indigenous lands, Roldán Ortega uses the example to discuss states' failure to develop the laws necessary to operationalize the indigenous rights guaranteed by the state's Constitution or ratified international treaties is Ecuador.

> While the [Ecuadorian] Constitution guarantees indigenous land rights, no law has been passed to define how they are to be granted. The only course of action available is to use the Civil Code, which is actually in conflict with some constitutionally guaranteed characteristics of indigenous land, such as inalienability (Roldán Ortega 2004, 15)

This lack of legal enforcement mechanisms to protect indigenous rights in Ecuador—and by extension, the rights of people living in communal lands even if they do not identify as indigenous—is one of the many ways in which collective land rights contribute to the invisibilization of certain populations

Teubal's article discusses movements at large, to the point that he equates peasant movements to indigenous struggles for land and self-determination. For example, he mentions the Confederación de Naciones Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador—CONAIE) , as one of the most important movements in 20th century Latin America in conversation with peasant movements such as the peasant movement Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers' Movement—MST) in Brazil. Moreover, his description of agrarian and land movements does not provide any insight in the fight for collective rights to land. On the other hand, Roldán Ortega's research does not focus on movements per se, it is an important look to

the outcomes of land reform struggles and the reality of communal land in Latin America.

Understanding the intricacies of collective land rights and land reforms in Latin America merits a thesis of its own, and there is extensive literature on this topic that can help understand the past, present, and future struggles of indigenous and non-indigenous people to gain fair rights to land ownership. However, not enough research has gone into understanding the particularities of communal lands in Ecuador and how the law empowers or disempowers the people living in comunas. As I progress into explaining the history of La Ley de las Comunas in Ecuador, it is important to keep in mind the findings or academics such as Teubal and Roldán Ortega on the short comings of the law to grant fair rights to rural (indigenous or not) populations.

Ecuador's Comunas: A History.

Ecuador ratified its first constitution as an independent country in 1830, and became a republic in 1835 (Álvarez 1999, 252). The original political territorial organization of Ecuador was that of departments, provinces, cantones, and parishes—each department was headed by a "Prefecto," a structure that continues to exist today. The indigenous peoples of Ecuador were not explicitly taken into account when drafting the new political organization of the country, and although they were all granted citizenship and rights, there was no special considerations or mentions of collective rights (Álvarez 1999, 252-253) in the original constitution.

In the 1929 Constitution, citizenship was defined under the Article 13: “a citizen is any Ecuadorian-born man or woman, over 21-years-old, that knows how to read and write” (Constitución 1929, 3). Although not explicitly, this phrasing excluded most indigenous and rural people who did not have access to education, it is in this context that in 1937 the Constitutional Assembly drafted La Ley de las Comunas. Under this new law, all precincts inhabited by at least 50 people had the right to register as a comuna (Álvarez 1999, 279). La Ley de las Comunas did not specify which kinds of communal lands could be registered as comunas or limit this right to indigenous peoples, leading many groups of peasants to get together and form a comuna without a common ethnic identity (Álvarez 2002a, 8). This law allowed for the institutionalization of a particular form of social organization, a more flexible understanding of citizenship, and the rapprochement of two different sociocultural worlds: the nation-state and the ethnic-local (Bazurco 2005, 40). After a preliminary reading of the context and background of La Ley de las Comunas, two different components of the story that stand out: on the one hand, the particular political environment existed in Ecuador at the country-level at the time of La Ley de las Comunas and the subsequent 1938 Constitution; and on the other hand, the more recent framing of the comuna structure as a “historical continuity” of ancient Manteño-Huancavilca leadership and social organization, as Ecuador undergoes a process of reconstruction of national identity. Understanding the complicated origins of La Ley de las Comunas sheds light on the vague nature of the law and the structural flaws that allow the comunas to remain invisible and unaccounted for in the eyes of the federal government. Furthermore, the more recent phrasing of the comuna structure as a

continuation of ancestral indigenous political organization contributes to the invisibilization of non-indigenous people living in comunas as the literature continues to focus on the injustices experienced by indigenous people in the past and the present.

In 1938, the authoritarian military government called for a Constitutional Assembly to replace the 1929 Constitution. This Assembly was unique and the first of its kind due to its composition. Rather than being comprised of representatives of Ecuador's different provinces, it called for representation of the three main political parties: conservatives, liberals, and leftist/socialists—in the end, there would be a slight majority in numbers from the socialist party, followed by the left, with the conservatives making up the smaller share (Gómez López 2012, 151-152; Quevedo Terán 2000, 61). Although this was not the Constitutional Assembly that put together La Ley de las Comunas, the 1938 Constitution would be the first one to include the comunas as a legitimate and recognized form of autonomous organization in Ecuador. However, this Constitution would be short lived.

On December 1st, 1938, the day the Constitution was to be ratified, the President of the Constitutional Assembly Manuen María Borrero stepped down following a series of rumors and accusations. This led to a "vertiginous carrousel of one secret meeting after the other, offers and counter offers," as the Assembly scrambled to vote on the last articles of the Constitution and the nomination for an interim President for the country (Quevedo Terán 2000, 63). The Constitution was fully finished at around 1:30 a.m. of December 2nd, at which point the Assembly announced that this newly written Constitution would be ratified by the President. An hour later, it was announced that

Camilo Octavio Andrade, former Minister of Defense, would step up as interim President, the Assembly also backtracked and announced the new Constitution came into force effective immediately, following this interim nomination, elections took place within the assembly and Aurelio Mosquera Narváez was elected President of the Republic, a position he was meant to hold until 1942 (Gómez López 2012, 158-161; Quevedo Terán 2000, 63). The following days proved to be just as politically charged and fast-paced, and finally on December 13, there was an abrupt call for the dissolution of the Constitutional Assembly, brought by discontent from the Conservative party. Two months later, in February of 1939, President Mosquera Narváez voted against the 1938 Constitution and the Assembly that had elected him President, reverting to the 1906 Constitution. Never formally distributed, and ratified during a time of political turmoil, the 1938 Constitution is known as "The Lost Constitution" and the original phrasing of La Ley de Las Comunas is lost in this context (Gómez López 2012, 163-167; Quevedo Terán 2000, 61). The law was included in the following 1945 Constitution, this phrasing was the basis for the most recent version Ley de las Comunas, which was ratified in 2004.

In "*Marginal Ethnicity" of the Comunas of the Santa Elena Peninsula, Ecuador,* Martín Bazurco makes the claim that, despite constitutional and formal attempts to disenfranchise indigenous peoples, comunas somewhat maintained control of their ancestral territories and a relative socio-economic autonomy throughout both the colonial and republican periods of Ecuadorian history (Bazurco 2005, 38-39). Additionally, he presents the comunas' "marginal ethnicity"—failing to fully identify as indigenous—as a

vulnerability as it excludes them from the protection afforded by the Ecuadorian constitution to ethnic groups and their lands (Bazurco 2005, 38-39). According to Bazurco, during the colonial period, the indigenous people of Santa Elena adopted Spanish settler's ways much earlier but they also distanced themselves, not allowing Spanish (white), blacks, or mestizos into their territories or "pueblos de indios" (indigenous villages) (Bazurco 2005, 39-40). Because of their early adoption of Spanish ways, not only were they able to separate themselves socially but they could use judicial resources as a tool of resistance (Bazurco 2005, 40), using the newly instituted Spanish rules to legislate their rights to land. Both Bazurco and Álvarez, make the case that it is this form of organization—a mixture of indigenous Manteño-Huancavilca forms of organization and Spanish laws—that paved the road for the nationalizing of the comunas as a valid structure for communal land rights.

However, it is important to highlight that under the original drafting of the law, the comunas were not created explicitly for indigenous peoples, but the phrasing made it possible for peasant unions to apply for comuna status. In fact, La Ley de las Comunas put the comunas under the responsibility of the ministry of agriculture and ranching (Bazurco 2005, 40) thus associating the comunas with agricultural/ranching/fishing production since the beginning, a relationship that continues to this date. And thus, comunas can be commonly associated with campesinos instead of indigenous people. At least in the comunas I visited in 2019, the main activities for the comuneros was agriculture, ecotourism, and lumber.

The narrative of the comunas as historical continuity is not only found in academia, but in fact the current Constitution of Ecuador (2008)—which is guided by the Quichua cosmovision of Good Living, "Sumak Kawsay"—recognizes the comunas as ancestral organizations, including in the new framework of resource redistribution and cultural recognition (Álvarez 2017). This is in contrast to the original phrasings of the law, which do not portray communal land as an indigenous right whatsoever (Constitución 1945).Under this narrative, and considering that although the majority of people in Santa Elena live in rural comunas only 1.4 percent of the population identifies as indigenous (Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010), it becomes crucial for the comunero to construct new identities as descendants of ancestral land owners and indigenous peoples if they wish to retain ownership rights over their lands.

The lack of research and official census information on the number of comunas and their inhabitants make it impossible to know how many of the original comunas formed under La Ley de las Comunas (in Santa Elena, Manabí, or elsewhere) where created by peasants, indigenous people, or indigenous peoples passing for peasants. Even today, it is unclear whether or not the majority of the comuna populations identify as indigenous or not. The information on Ecuador's 2010 census breaks up information by Province, but once you access that there is no breakdown of smaller political entities. In other words, major provincial cities such as Santa Elena or La Libertad are just like small rural comunas such as El Azúcar to the eyes of the census takers and the reports on livelihood and population.

La Ley de las Comunas is meant to empower certain populations by granting them collective control of their land, however its vague phrasing allows for lack of accountability from the government (both the comuna government and Ecuador's national government), to protect the rights of the people living in such lands. It is not the communal land itself that is disenfranchising people; my argument is not to be confused for one of private property vs. communal lands, but the construction of the law as it stands today is contributing to the comuneros being forgotten and overlooked, at times intentionally by the people who are supposed to be protecting their interests.

During my research in Ecuador, I had the opportunity to visit Salango in the Province of Manabí. Salango is a Parroquia in the coast that today has a robust research base on zoology, archaeology, and anthropology in addition to a brand new natural history museum managed by the Parroquia. Upon our arrival, we were under the impression that Salango remained a comuna and that the museum and research base had been done through the leadership of the comuna government. However the people in Salango told us "nothing gets done as a comuna, all the change happened when they became a Parroquia" forgoing their collective rights to land. Although this could be easily constructed as an argument in favor of private property, it is important to understand that the structure of the comunas today was imposed to them by the government and continues to hinder the progress of the people living in collective lands. Each comuna is led by a President who rules over a cabinet composed of a Vice President, a Treasurer, a Secretary, and a Syndic (Interview #4, Appendix 2). The president runs for election with

the cabinet, and comuna elections take place every year in December. With the leadership of the comuna changing so frequently, long-term projects are hard to accomplish.

Furthermore, it remains unclear to me how the comunas receive funds from the government or how much money are they supposed to pay to the Federación de Comunas annualy in order to retain their status as a comuna. None of this information is available online nor the people I talked to were able to tell me. With limited funds, an everchanging leadership, and plenty of opportunities for clientelism (more on Chapter 2), the challenges the comunas face to advance their own quality of life become clearer. However, these challenges are not taken into account by the government or the existing literature.

To use Smith's theory of invisibility, the comunas are not picked up by "the gaze." The comunas are remote and far away from urban centers, accessible only by long dirt roads in most cases. It is not in the interest of the people living in Santa Elena to understand or care about the lives of the comuneros. They do not pay federal taxes, they have autonomous governments, and commonly survive thanks to subsistence agriculture without the need of engaging in commerce with people outside of the comuna. La Ley de las Comunas grants them normalcy and invisibility, it protects their right to collective right, but it also hides the people's needs and the reality of their lives. In Chapter 2, I will explore how this invisibility disproportionately affects and disenfranchises poor rural comunera women.

Chapter 2. Invisible Women: Themes and Observations from the Comunas

My time in Ecuador's comunas was mostly divided among three comunas: El Azúcar, Dos Mangas, and Las Balsas. El Azúcar was our home base, and my first introduction to the comuna structure; our key informants were two women who were born and raised in El Azúcar but had since moved away to larger cities with their husbands and children because of the comuna's lack of opportunities. It was through my conversations with them both that I got to know Dos Mangas as a potential for what El Azúcar *could* have been and Las Balsas as what El Azúcar *should* have been. As stated earlier, when I first arrived in Ecuador my goal was to observe and compare the roles of comuneras in El Azúcar, where most of the land has been sold off to foreign and national industrial agriculture companies, to the roles of comuneras in Dos Mangas, where the ecotourism industry is booming. These observations were meant to inform a proposal for a community-based ecotourism development project in Las Balsas completed with potential roles for the women. Although this thesis is no longer about community-based ecotourism, I find that the themes and roles I observed in the comuneras I interacted with are key in understanding the invisibility of women in Ecuador's comunas. Thus, I will begin this chapter with a narration of my time in Ecuador before I go into an analysis of the themes. These are only three out of 68 comunas in Santa Elena, and a much larger and comprehensive study should take place before any final conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of La Ley de las Comunas. However, the narration of my experiences on this trip is important in finding the themes I will use to argue about the

hardships experienced by the women I interacted with, which I assume is the case for most of the non-indigenous women living in Ecuador's comunas.

***Figure 3**. Map of Case Studies*

After a short stay in Guayaquil, in order to prepare for the trip to the comunas, we had to make a short stop at the Bastión Popular where one of our key informants currently lives. The Bastión Popular is an informal urban settlement located at the north

of Guayaquil (around 9 km away from the city center), it is estimated to house 50 thousand people in 2004 (Tiepolo 2007, 8). Although we lucked out when it came to finding a taxi, we were told it usually takes a lot of convincing a driver to take you to the Bastión Popular. Many of the people that currently own houses at the Bastión Popular have migrated from rural areas, such as El Azúcar, and commute to work in the city of Guayaquil every day. I began my field research with a trip to El Azúcar. The trip was long and bumpy, and it involved taking an un-signaled turn on the highway into a dirt road which we followed for about 8 kilometers. This was my first introduction to the comunas, a broken sign that read "Comuna El Azúcar" at the end of a dirt road, nestled in between huge commercial banana plantations and subsistence agricultural plots. Prior to seeing that sign, I had no idea that communal lands existed in Ecuador.

El Azúcar has an area of 8,435 hectares and a population of 2 thousand people of which 355 are affiliated to the comuna (Zambrano and Esther 2015, 11). Children played in the street and people rode motorcycles to visit the grocery stores on the other side of the comuna's center square, a 10 minute walk away. In the evenings, as the sun begins to set, you can see men sitting together outside of their concrete houses, hanging out and enjoying the fresh air. In many cases, the women are also reunited and spending time together but they remain inside for the most part, often by paying each other visits at their shops and houses.

I learned in El Azúcar many of the original communal lands have been sold and/or leased to foreign buyers and commercial farming as a result of Ecuador's neoliberal land reforms. The men work lands that used to be theirs and women have been

pushed out of the agricultural sector. The two women that were my key informants throughout the trip recounted how much the comuna has changed from when they were children. “Agriculture was everyone’s business,” they said. “My grandmother used the machete better than any man.” Everything has changed over the past 20 years, they said. Before people used to grow their own food and keep animals in their yard. Now they can’t have cows or chickens because if they wander off to the privately owned land they will get shot. As for women, now they stick to the home and the children because there are no jobs for them in industrial farming. My informants shared with me that the girls in El Azúcar are getting married younger as a way of upward social mobility while young men are looking for opportunities to migrate to the cities, mostly to Guayaquil. However, they pointed out that nowadays divorces are more common. “Before, even if he was a bad man women never got divorces. Now they get divorced right away.”

Both the women were hopeful and excited about the prospect of visiting Las Balsas. A comuna they thought was the example everyone should follow. “Las Balsas paid attention. They noticed what has happened to El Azúcar and other comunas like ours. They are sticking together, they are not letting go of their land,” they said.

Our stay in El Azúcar was brief, as soon we left for our second destination of the comunas visit: Dos Mangas. Dos Mangas is by far the best known comuna of the Santa Elena province. Famous for its natural beauty, tourists from all over Ecuador and the world travel the dirt road to Dos Mangas to visit the waterfall and the natural pools. At first sight, Dos Mangas consists only of one main street, with some small roads coming out of its sides that guide you to different homes and small plantations. The road to Dos

Mangas was much different than that of El Azucar, much closer to the ocean, the area is much more of a tourist trap and it is plagued with beach houses and cheap inns and hostels. Dos Mangas is near Manglaralto, a Parroquia Rural (a division of local government) and near Montañita, a popular destination for young travelers and backpackers.

Figure 4. *Maria's House in El Azúcar, Picture by Kassel Franco Garibay (2019)*

Out of the three comunas I visited last summer, Dos Mangas is the only one that appears on Santa Elena's website and has any official information available. According to the Prefectura de Santa Elena, Dos Mangas has a population of 950 people (it does not specify how many are affiliated to the comuna) of which 160 are "females dedicated to

crafting" (Dos Mangas n.d.). What sets apart Dos Mangas as one of the only comunas listed on the government's website, is the comuna's incredibly successful ecotourism venture. Tourists come in and out of the comuna every day to visit the waterfall and the natural pools (as of now, there are no hostels or places for tourists to spend the night in Dos Mangas, making it a day-trip location). While there is still plenty of agricultural and lumber work being done by the residents of Dos Mangas, including the growing and harvesting of bamboo for furniture, many of the people are involved in ecotourism. The sexual division of labor is clear in Dos Mangas, and after my conversations with the women it quickly became clear that even if the tourism business improved the livelihoods of everyone, the re/productive roles of women have not changed but expanded.

What the Prefectura deems as an "equitable division of activities" (Dos Mangas n.d.), involves the women weaving handbags, baskets, hats, and other crafts with "paja toquilla" (toquilla straw commonly used in producing the famous Panama hats). Other jobs for women are as cooks at the only restaurant in the comuna, which is located next to the tourism booth so that the tourists can enjoy a homemade meal before or after going on a hike, or as secretaries of the tourism booth. The men in the comuna work by becoming tour guides or making handcrafts out of tagua nuts (also called ivory-nut palms) with power tools.

On our first full day in Dos Mangas, we were asked by our host—Drew Alumna, Sarah Rowe—to travel to Manglaralto to purchase medicine for some of her archaeology students who had fallen ill. It was early in the morning when we caught a ride on one of the cars that act as buses going back and forth between Dos Mangas and Manglaralto. It

was a Chevy truck, and because we were one of the first passengers we actually got to sit inside, while most of the 10-14 year-old-children had to stand on the back of the truck. This is how they get to school every day, as far as we could see, there were no schools in Dos Mangas. Although Manglaralto is the Parroquia, sort of like a capital city—it has the hospital, pharmacies, and schools—every tourism booth and advertisement pointed people in the direction of Dos Mangas. Manglaralto is not a comuna, and it is most definitely urbanized in a way that Dos Mangas is not. Without the appeal of its nature and its tourism, Dos Mangas would be as inaccessible and invisible as El Azúcar.

Following our Manglaralto adventure, we walked down the main street of Dos Mangas to the tourism booth. The booth is located next to the only restaurant in the comuna, a restaurant that feeds the tourists and the archaeology students doing fieldwork, such as us and those with Sarah Rowe. Behind the restaurant is the abandoned structure of what used to be the Asociación de Mujeres Artesanas (the Association of Artisan Women), something I was intrigued about and eventually asked for more information in one of my interviews.

Upon requesting a tour at the booth, we were given a pair or rainboots and a brief introduction to Dos Mangas and what it has to offer by the secretary. Then they took our information, such as how many of us were there, our country of origin, and how we heard about Dos Mangas. Later, when we interviewed one of the secretaries of the booth they told us they input this information into a database that they then share with the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism). However, as far as I can tell, this information is not accessible anywhere online.

When our tour guide, a man, came, two high school students announced they were joining our tour. They told us they were students from Manglaralto, since they were students at the technical school enrolled in the tourism branch, they had to complete an apprenticeship at the tourism booth in order to be able to graduate. They were both 17 years old, a girl and a boy. When I asked them whether or not they saw themselves giving tours in the future, the boy responded he definitely saw it as a possibility while the girl said she liked working on the booth more. All the secretaries that run the booth have been women since the booth's construction in 2000. Dos Mangas does not have female tour guides.

As our tour guide guided us through the fields, pointing out different crops and animals, I asked him questions about ecotourism in the comuna. He told me Dos Mangas had been famous for a while now, but that he remembered it all began in the 1980s after a couple of German tourists mobilized the community to start an ecotourism venture. After hiking on their own and falling in love with the waterfall and the natural pools, the German tourists actually went back to Germany and managed to obtain a grant for the government of Germany and Ecuador to get together and formally train some men to become tour guides. I have not been able to corroborate this information anywhere, but he showed me his official tour guide badge and proudly announced he had been one of the first men to get certified. When I asked, he said that at least on the first class of trainees there had been no women involved.

Additionally, our tour guide was the first person in Dos Mangas to mention something that I unfortunately would listen to often during my stay in the comuna: people

in Dos Mangas had never historically cared about the environment, but that the government and some foreign tourists had taught them to appreciate the beauty of their forest, of their waterfalls and their natural pools. They say the foreign visitors love nature and that is why they must conserve it, because it attracted people and income. Our tour guide constantly congratulated me and my project partner for being "so young and so intelligent unlike the people in the comuna," for actually caring about the environment. The tour was given to us in Spanish, and thus I had to translate to English for my partner. Halfway through our tour, the guide apologized for having forgotten a book with the names of plants and animals in English so that he could show her. When I reassured him it was okay, he continued by saying "I know it is okay, because the foreigners are always so much smarter than we are. I could be saying all of this in Spanish without you to translate, and she could figure it out. The foreigners are always smarter." These comments from our tour guide set the scene for most of our conversations in Dos Mangas.

When we returned from the hike, all the handcraft shops were open. Usually tended after by women, the shops attract the visitors by displaying their art on counters and windows. Since I originally went to Ecuador with a plan of writing my thesis on community-based ecotourism, these were the women I interviewed. My project partner, Abigail and I spent two days visiting shop after shop, talking to the women to learn more about their lives and their perception of tourism. Women had different definitions of tourism, but they didn't see themselves as having a role in the industry. As I briefly mentioned in this thesis' introduction, for most of the women, tourism was something

that happened *to them* and that the visitors *brought with them,* not a direct action from their part.

Just as they did not talk to me about having relationship to nature (the way indigenous people do), the handcrafts they do are also not endogenous to their region or at all associated to their identity. Every person I talked to told me it had been the government that taught the women and men of Dos Mangas how to make crafts with tagua and paja toquilla. Furthermore, they all talked about the importance of conserving the land and stopping the irresponsible cutting down of the trees because "nature is what attracts the tourists, it's what they want to see."

The most important finding of my conversation with the women, was the fact that when I asked women what they thought their roles were in the tourism of Dos Mangas, they only gave individual answers. They saw individual benefits for doing their crafts in that they had an occupation and means to obtain enough money to care for their children. When I asked how tourism had changed the lives of women, some said their lives had not changed at all while the others mentioned the benefits of having a job opportunity. All of them talked about the changes to *their* lives as opposed to the lives of women as a whole. The abandoned Asociación de Mujeres Artesanas is physical example of how Dos Mangas' women do not see their identity as women as a political one, or one to group themselves around.

In my longest interview at Dos Mangas (Interview #4 in Appendix 2), I was able to talk to the first woman to begin selling hand crafts in the comuna. In fact, when I first announced that I was interested in writing about women and ecotourism everybody

pointed me in the direction of this woman's shop. When I asked her what changes had she noticed in the lives of women since tourism started, she said women used to get married much younger in Dos Mangas and only occupied themselves by raising children. "But now, and I can tell you from experience, we keep ourselves busy with our stores. Ever since I started working I thought to myself: "maybe I will have three kids only, maybe I won't have 12 kids" [laughs]" (Interview #4), she said. She was the only person to mention the women's political involvement as having changed as a result of ecotourism. My interviewee mentioned that prior to women having active economic roles as craft makers and store owners, no women were involved in the politics of the comuna. She highlighted the importance for women to be affiliated to the comuna, saying that only women could look out for other women, and thus she raised her daughters to be politically active and educated, being able to send them all to college with the income from her shop. In comparison to the other artisan women we talked to, her crafts were about twice the price because she is both nationally and internationally known for her paja toquilla art.

In the interview, I asked about the abandoned Asociación de Mujeres Artesanas (Association of Artisan Women), which I had walked past every day in Dos Mangas. My interviewee told me she had the idea for it and applied for funds to the government in 2000. Her vision was to do a sort of assembly line in which all the women worked together to make high quality crafts more quickly. The restaurant was also built with the funds for this program, and the restaurant was to be managed by a different woman every month so that everybody had fair access to the income gained by the restaurant. As she

told me this, I could tell that she was still upset about her vision not having been fulfilled. In the end, she decided to quit as president of the Asociación and stick to her own store. At the height of the project, 26 women worked together and she remembered fondly the quality of their crafts and how they were praised when they traveled to fairs and expositions to sell their products. “But you know how women are,” she said with a chuckle before describing the downfall of the Asociación.

Being an artisan woman in Dos Mangas seems to me a lonely task. They walk by themselves into the fields to reap the paja toquilla and they dye it in their backyards. It is hard labor and they often enlist their daughters to help watch the shops or dry the straw while they weave the hats and baskets. Although all the informal and formal conversations I had with the women in Dos Mangas said that they wish there were more tourists and they could produce crafts more quickly so that they could sell more, none of them brought up the proposal of bringing back the Asociación or collaborating with each other.

Figure 5. *Souvenir Shop in Dos Mangas, Picture by Kassel Franco Garibay (2019)*

We spent three days in Dos Mangas before taking off to Salango, where we spent two days before taking off to Salinas. And then back to El Azúcar to re-group. Following that, we went to Santa Elena, the capital of the province to visit the Prefectura and talk to people working in the Ministerio de Turismo. By then, all I knew about the comuna structure and the inner workings of the comuna came from conversations with comuneros and comuneras themselves. So I was interested in hearing the perspective of the government employees living in more urban areas. I spoke to two different people working in the Ministerio de Turismo, and asked them similar questions to those I had for the comuneras—what is the role of women and government in ecotourism ventures, how can the lives of women change with ecotourism, etc. However, none of them agreed to

have our conversation recorded and they insisted in having informal conversations only; therefore their names and titles are omitted and the quotes on this section are paraphrased from my notes.

In the Prefectura, I found out that the people affiliated with a comuna do not pay taxes but they were important because they still vote on province and national elections. Both the people I talked to at the Ministerio de Turismo emphasized the importance of working with the comuneros despite how difficult it was in order to convince them to vote for a certain candidate, as it was mentioned earlier, most of the population of Santa Elena resides in comunas, which makes them the most important population in electoral terms. When I discovered this, all of the signs of clientelism that I had noticed in El Azúcar and Dos Mangas became very clear to me. According to the *Oxford Handbook of Political Science,* clientelism refers to "giving material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you/will you support me?" (Stokes 2011). Being from Mexico, I am familiar with clientelism but in Ecuador's comunas I saw much more visual signs than anywhere else I have been. I could not help but notice the fact that almost all homes and stores were covered in posters and murals of different politicians and political parties. Most of the comuneros wore t-shirts promoting one political party or the other. In Las Balsas, I asked one of the men whether or not he supported the candidate named on the walls of his home. He told me he would vote because he had given his home a new roof and a coat of paint, but he did not particularly care if he won or not.

The transactional and conditional nature of clientelism also became evident to me when the people at the Ministerio de Turismo insisted it was difficult to work with comuneros, because they never show any initiative. "These comunas, they want us to give them everything for free, they ask us to do everything for them, they need us to finish up their projects. It is very difficult to work with the comunas," he continued. "They do not pay any taxes, but they are the ones that ask for the most. And you got to give it to them, because most people live there. We are politicians, you know, their vote counts." In other interactions with government officials and employees, I heard them refer to the members of comunas as "lazy, unorganized, and simple" in multiple occasions. However, in my experience this was far from the case. In fact, in one of my conversations with a comunero in Las Balsas, he mentioned he and many other men had approached the government with a program proposal to grow cacao or coffee. The men asked for resources and funds to grow their plantations, but every time they went to the government asking for money or material resources to group with each other and start large plantation projects in association with other comuneros, the response was the same: "I can give *you* something, because you are my friend. But I am not interested in sponsoring a large project, that is a lot of work," they said.

This was disheartening to hear since one of the purposes of our trip was to propose a community-based ecotourism project to the Prefectura to obtain funds for Las Balsas. Las Balsas—more specifically, a region of the comuna called Los Ceibitos—seemed to be the perfect location for a new ecotourism venture similar to Dos Mangas. When talking to people from El Azúcar and Dos Mangas, they often talked about Las

Balsas as one of the few comunas that are still holding on to their lands, refusing to sell them to foreign investors or large agricultural corporations. When we drove from Santa Elena to Las Balsas, we saw large plantations but no signs in foreign languages or any indicators that the lands belonged to large corporations unlike on the road to El Azúcar. The large plantations in Las Balsas are actually a product of comuneros partnering together and merging their plots so that they can collaborate.

Figure 6. *Comuna Las Balsas, Picture by Martha Suárez de la Cruz (2015)*

On our first night in Las Balsas, we took a birdwatching tour, led by the guardabosques (forest rangers employed by either private conservation efforts or the Ministry of Agriculture). We were taken to the edge of a cliff to watch approximately 2000 green macaws make their journey back to their trees at the end of the day. The guides had all of the equipment for us to enjoy the tour, they had binoculars for us and an incredible amount of information that never seemed to cease. Although this is not a tour

you can book online officially, it quickly became clear to us that Las Balsas had the potential of becoming a big ecotouristic attraction, just like Dos Mangas. From her archaeological work, Maria Masucci knew Las Balsas had a lot of potential as an archaeological field school and site, and it became clear that the macaws and the howling monkeys in the surrounding forests would draw all kinds of animal experts and lovers. Although they were not formal interviews, our intention was to strike conversation with anyone we could at Las Balsas so that we could gauge their interest in starting an ecotouristic venture. All of the men seemed to be excited at the prospect of receiving training to become tour guides and all brought up ideas for different hike routes and animals the tourists would like to see; they showed the initiative the employees from the Ministry of Tourism claimed comuneros were incapable of.

Getting ideas and initiatives from the women was much harder, mostly because we hardly ever got an opportunity to talk to the women in Las Balsas. Like in El Azúcar, the women mostly kept to their houses, sat inside their stores, and engaged in commerce from the inside as opposed to the women in Dos Mangas who sat outside on the street, striking conversation with all tourists. The longest conversation we had with a Las Balsas comunera mostly revolved around her role as the manager of their plantation, she explained to us what she did on a day to day basis and it quickly became clear to us that she was as much in charge in the farm as her husband was. However, when I asked her if she thought women would be interested in starting a tourism venture, possibly making handcrafts, selling food, or giving tours, she had to check with her husband before confirming it was a good idea.

The lives of the women in the comunas were incredibly different in El Azúcar, Dos Mangas, and Las Balsas. However, these are only three out of 68 comunas in Santa Elena, and a much larger and comprehensive study should take place before any final conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of La Ley de las Comunas in empowering the people living in communal lands, particularly for non-indigenous rural women. During my time in Ecuador I was able to identify some themes that are worth thinking about when discussing the quality of life of comuneras in Ecuador's coast: rural to urban migration, women's access to land, ecotourism's benefits and disadvantages, and private and public spaces in the comunas. These themes, I believe, should be researched and compared across Ecuador's comunas to discover more about the development status and the lives of poor rural women living in comunas. When I decided to write about the lives of these women, I discovered that all of the literature on Ecuadorian women was useless for this purpose. Alternatively, the literature I found on communal land rights and non-indigenous rural women was never about the Ecuadorian case in particular. In the following sections I will expand on each of these themes, focusing on the available literature and how it answers some questions about Ecuador's comunas while leaving many others unaddressed.

Lack of opportunities lead to move from the country to the cities

Not only did both of our key informants in Ecuador were prime examples of rural-urban migration, but throughout my time in Ecuador's comunas it became common for us to hear stories of people choosing to migrate out of the comunas in search of a higher

quality of life. Research on rural-urban migration in Latin America has largely proven that migration to urban areas is mostly performed by women rather than men (Brydon and Chant 1989, 125; Deere and León de Leal 1987, 240). Unlike migration in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and even the Caribbean where migration to the cities is characteristically a male experience (Brydon and Chant 1989, 125), in Latin America the rural population most likely to migrate to urban areas within the same country is young single women between 10 and 19 years of age (Deere and León de Leal 1987, 240). However, despite this important finding, in "Rural Women and Migration in Latin America" María de los Angeles Crummett says "analyses of women's roles in the migratory process have been notably lacking" (Crummett 1987, 239). The implications of failing to include gender analysis in research about migration are significant, starting with the fact that any development policies aimed to diminish rural-urban migration or increase work and education opportunities in rural areas will be incomplete.

When talking about migration, the "push-pull" model is often used to explain patterns in migration. "Pull, or demand factors, in urban areas (new industries, employment opportunities and expectations of better wages) draw the rural population to the cities, whereas push, or supply factors in the rural sector (stagnation and the reorganization of agricultural production) provoke outmigration" (Crummett 1987, 243). According to Crummett, the reason why women predominate in migration towards urban areas is twofold: greater demand for female labor in cities (mostly in domestic service) and the relatively minor role of female work in rural areas. "Therefore women are the first to be freed to migrate to the cities" (Crummett 1987, 243). This breakdown of push

and pull factors is specific to the Latin American case, however it does not take into account the particularities of collective land and Ecuador's comunas specific case study. In my observations while at the comunas, not only did I witness firsthand the high numbers of cityward migration out of the comunas (both by men and women) but most people in El Azúcar attributed this change to the loss of communal land in the comuna. When transitioning to commercial agriculture, the women were pushed out of the agricultural sector and lost their occupation and opportunities for income. Without a job in subsistence agriculture or any opportunities for employment in the comuna outside of opening yet another shop, comuneras are pushed out of their comuna in search for job opportunities in the city. Crummett continues by arguing

> women are the first to be displaced by the introduction of technological innovations because men are relatively more privileged in terms of access to essential resources such as land, labor, cash, education, and know-how. Consequently, women are more easily displaced from tasks that can be mechanized or remunerated (Crummett 1987, 245).

Migration affects men and women differently, and today the push and pull factors in Latin America, and specifically in Ecuador's comunas are contributing to the disproportionate amount of female rural-urban migration.

Both Crummett and Lynne Brydon in "Gender and Migration" continue their discussion on the effects of migration on the women left behind in rural areas. The age and sex selectivity of migration, specifically when young daughters are pushed out of rural households "can have profound effects on the household, division of labor by transferring work roles from the young to the old and by increasing the work burden of

women" (Crummett 1987, 252), increasing many mother's unpaid reproductive and care chores. Furthermore, Brydon points out a migrant's ties to the home community might remain for years after they have moved out, and for the majority of migrants this includes careful distribution of wages between the portion of the family left behind in rural areas and those trying to make it in the city (Brydon and Chant 1989, 130). When it is the women who migrate to the cities by themselves, in many cases the money they make might not be for their use only as they might be expected to contribute to the household. And when the women are left behind with the children as the men migrate cityward to gain better jobs, whatever money gets back to them is meant for the family as a whole.

No access to land pushes women back to domestic roles

Although collective land rights are meant to empower people by granting them access to land for either subsistence or commercial agriculture, most of land reforms tend to be phrased in gender neutral terms. When women are not taken into account explicitly, they might lose out in land-owning opportunities which then contributes to the push factors driving women out of the comunas and rural areas. Furthermore, it is difficult for women to be taken into account when there is little data on *who* the women are and *what* they own. In *The Gender Asset Gap: Land in Latin America,* Carmen D. Deere and Magdalena León (2003) revisit the question of women's land ownership that they explored more extensively in their 2001 book *Empowering Women: Land and Property Rights in Latin America.* According to Deere and León, there are very few examples of Latin American agricultural censuses that publish gender disaggregated data on the

country's farmers. "Moreover, many still do not include the variable 'sex' in the census questionnaire. Further, none of the agricultural censuses ask whom in the household is the legal landowner and few inquire as to how ownership of land was acquired" (Deere and Leon 2003, 926). Without this information, it is nearly impossible to understand the extent of the gender gap in land ownership. Much of the existing data is obscured as "family farms" where it is impossible to know how much power women have in decision making in farming. However, the little data available shows that women's participation as primary farmers ranges from a low of 7 percent in countries such as Guatemala and a high of 24 percent in Chile (Deere and Leon 2003, 927).

Although there is an ever-growing literature on the gender gap in land ownership in Latin America and other areas of the world, the only source I was able to find that focuses on both communal land rights and non-indigenous rural woman was "Women and Access to Communal Land in Latin America" by Susana Lastarria-Cornhiel. The article is a comparison between Guatemala and Bolivia's approaches to communal land in relation to women's rights, and although it does not include Ecuador as a case study much of her findings can be extrapolated to the case of Ecuador's comunas.

According to Lastarria-Conhiel, in Latin America, the structure of land ownership is characterized by two types of property: "concentrations of agricultural and fishing lands in the hands of a few owners or communal lands in the hands of peasant communities and indigenous groups" (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2011, 62). Communal lands in the hands of peasant and indigenous communities, for the most part, follow a model that combines individual exploitation of fertile lands for subsistence agriculture and

communal control of the grazing and forest lands for both individual and commercial use. This is exemplified by what I observed in Ecuador, with families having their own plots of land where they grew the food they ate every day and traded with others, while large sections of land were communally used to raise cattle and grow trees for cutting. However, Lastarria-Cornhiel argues that with the commercialization of agriculture and ownership projects, communal lands have been transforming into private property " (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2011, 63), such as what is happening in El Azúcar and what Las Balsas is attempting to avoid.

In her introduction, Lastarria-Cornhiel highlights the lack of gender disaggregated data on the distribution of land in communal property and draws on examples from Mexico's attempt to communally-managed lands or *ejidos.* From the beginning, ejido members were mostly male and only single mothers or widows with children were able to receive lands and be ejido members" (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2011, 64). According to the limited research, by year 2000 women controlled only 18 percent of communal lands in Mexico's ejidos and made up 27 percent of the ejido membership. However, they only made up 5 percent of the assembly and leadership positions (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2011, 64). Although in writing there are no longer any legal obstacles for women to own ejido lands, Lastarria-Cornhiel identifies a series of non-legal obstacles standing in the way of women's land ownership. These include the neglect of women's labor in agricultural production and their omission on development programs, the leadership of the ejidos being majority male (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2011, 65-66). This, again, resonates with my findings and observations in Ecuador, where women are not explicitly excluded from

participating in comuna meetings and/or running for government positions as Comuna Presidents or members of the cabinet, they are also not incentivized to participate politically. Although in conversation they could all mention one or two women that had been a part of a cabinet or even a president in recent years, none of the comunas we visited is currently led by a woman. The lack of official information on comuna leadership and membership makes it nearly impossible to create quantitative data on how many women have taken positions as cabinet members or even comuna associates.

Ecotourism as something imposed on them from the outside

There has been plenty research done on ecotourism and community-based ecotourism (CBET)—a subset of ecotourism in which the initiative to transform the space into a tourist destination comes from the community itself and it is the same members of the community that organize and run the tourist attractions. The literature includes evaluations on the successfulness of ecotourism and CBET in empowering and developing rural communities and there is a strong literature on the effects of ecotourism on gender roles and gender empowerment. The literature on the latter often conflicts on its findings, with some advocating for CBET and tourism as catalysts for women's financial and social empowerment and others challenging the positive effects of ecotourism on gender roles and community development. For example, Pierre Walter (2011) argues that in some cases women's reproductive labor is intensified when involved in ecotourism.

> Women's domestic tasks are commodified and extended as service for tourists (feeding guests, collecting fuelwood, hauling water for food and bathing, cleaning guest rooms, making beds, etc.). [As well as the] intangible, background 'emotional work' of hosting, hospitality and dispute resolution (making guests feel comfortable, safe and welcome) (Walter 2011, 163)

Another important example in which the gender division of labor in tourism might be exacerbated and contribute to the oppression of women comes from the assumption that the work of organizing and running CBET ventures and managing the resources and community needs is largely seen as male work (Walter 2011, 164). Both of these examples resonate with me as similar of what I observed in Dos Mangas. The women in Dos Mangas were responsible for the domestic/reproductive tasks of feeding the guests (managing the restaurant) and the emotional work of hosting (working at the tourism booth) while men were associated with more "active" roles such as being tour guides. Additionally, the people I talked to in Dos Mangas about how they promote the comuna and their tourism offerings they mention tourism caravans or tours organized by the Ministerio de Turismo in which they invited male comuneros to travel with them across the country and sometimes abroad to promote their hand crafts and their hiking tours. When the women were included in such initiatives, they were often invited to represent themselves and promote their own craft as opposed as representing the comuna.

When I talked to a government official that works at the Ministerio de Turismo, I asked him what he believed was the role of women in ecotourism. He responded by saying the role of men was "easily identifiable" since they could be tour guides, but the

women were more complicated. “You have to understand, the areas that do ecotourism are very poor. So the women stay inside all day cooking for their husbands. They have to come together and do… I don’t know, like a restaurant. They can get together with other women, cook food and sell it to the men in the comuna that go off to work every day.” It is key to highlight that this is what people at the Ministerio de Turismo believe is an appropriate (domestic) role for women, and since they are the ones responsible for workshops to develop and empower ecotourist ventures across the countries, women’s domestic roles are perpetuated and reproduced. Under this light, it is relevant to examine the literature on CBET and ecotourism that shows some concerns about the industry perpetuating “perpetuating a particular image or view of the developing world that satisfies the tastes of ecotourists … rather than national or local views and goals” (Duffy 2006, 3). In other words, often times ecotourism ventures have been accused of imposing a certain narrative on the communities in order to be able to “sell” them as products. These literature findings came to mind when I was conducting interviews in Dos Mangas and asked the women where they had learned how to weave baskets and make crafts out of paja toquilla. Although we are encouraged to think of the crafts as endogenous to the zone and cultural markers of the comunas, all of the comuneros told me they had been taught by the government on how to make the crafts that “the tourists enjoy.” Although there is no denying that selling crafts provides the comuneras with an income that helps them care for their families, it is important to note that this activity was imposed on them by the government, even if Ecuador’s Tourism government website describes them as “ancestral weaving practices. They are taught from generation from generation and are an

example of the traditions, customs, inventiveness, and ability of [Dos Mangas'] inhabitants" (Dos Mangas, un paraíso escondido del Ecuador – Ministerio de Turismo n.d.). Additionally, it is important to keep in mind the official narrative about Dos Mangas promoted by the local government. As it was previously mentioned, Dos Mangas is the only comuna we visited that is listed in Santa Elena's website. The description of the comuna genders the crafts available in the area (women are responsible for paja toquilla crafts while men use power tools to make crafts out of tagua), the description also claims that "it is very fortunate that women have access to the raw materials [paja toquilla] to work, as it is the only source of income they have access to" (Dos Mangas n.d.). The narrative in the government's website is a powerful one, as it is most likely what people have access to when doing research for their next touristic adventure. In order to satisfy the costumers, the comuna has to adhere to what is described on the website, which includes relegating the women to certain tasks and maintaining crafts as their only sources of income.

The visibility of women in the comunas

At times, the invisible/visible dichotomy in Ecuador's comunas was perfectly and literally clear. In Dos Mangas, the women sat outside at their shops striking conversation with the tourists and occupying public spaces in the comuna (i.e. the main road). The opposite was the case in El Azúcar and Las Balsas, where women stayed inside their homes and conducted business from inside their homes. In Las Balsas, for example, the wife of the house where we stayed at (who managed the crops and was in charge of

hectares of plantations) sold her crops from inside the house through a window on the patio. Women would walk up and exchange money for roasted yuca before returning to their homes. When we asked a woman to use her oven (one of the only ovens in Las Balsas) to bake a cake, we discovered she actually sold popsicles. There was no sign drawing attention to this service, but she said she had always sold popsicles and her mother had taught her how to do it. While our cake was baking, various children and mothers walked up to the house and bought popsicles without the house owner ever stepping out of her doorframe.

When I left Ecuador and decided to focus on comuneras as a research topic for my thesis, the women were all but invisible in the literature. In *Gendered Paradoxes: Women's Movements, State Restructuring, And Global Development in Ecuador,* Amy Lind—one of the leading academics working on Ecuadorian woman—focuses "primarily in how poor Ecuadorian women's political and economic strategies, in theory and practice, have been framed (by participants themselves as well as by researchers of women's movements) within a national and global social, economic, political, and discursive context" (Lind 2005, 12). Because of her focus on *organized* women, Lind completely disregards poor rural women who do not identify as indigenous and are not organized around their identities as women. Lind's paradox is that "since the inception of neoliberal development policies in Ecuador and throughout Latin America,… women's movements have gained, rather than lost, institutional power" (Lind 2005, 20). However, there is absolutely no literature on how neoliberal development policies and land reforms have affected comuneras in Ecuador. In order to approach this question, I will explore

feminist theories of development and rethink them in light of what I have learned about the comunas in Ecuador in order to give advice on where I think future research and development policies could improve the livelihoods of non-indigenous poor rural women in Ecuador's comunas.

Chapter 3: Gender, Development and Visibility

In this chapter, I will reconsider feminist theories of development—Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD)—in light of the lives of poor rural women in Ecuador, particularly those living in the comunas of Santa Elena. Upon my return from conducting field study in Ecuador, I began my research by getting my hands on all the books I could find on indigenous women. My first instinct was to look at women's organizing in connection with the development of La Ley de las Comunas, only to find that Ecuador lacked a strong rural women's movement that could be researched for this purpose. It was by listening to the recordings of interviews and reading my field notes that I eventually came to the conclusion that it was critical to read the experiences of non-indigenous rural women through the lens of development. Regardless of the fact that Ecuador's non-indigenous comuneras have fallen through the cracks of the literature, their lives in the margins continue to be affected by forces such as government decisions, neoliberal economic policies, the United Nation's sustainable development goals, and (in Ecuador) la Ley de las Comunas. Even if their lives are invisible to the eyes of academia and policy-makers, there are material consequences from the omission of poor rural women from development planning. Most importantly, as this chapter will show, the key takeaway of any feminist theory of development is that when policies and programs are gender-blind or gender neutral, it is *always* the women that are left behind.

Poor rural communities in the coast of Ecuador were put under the comuna system under the guise that they were equals to indigenous people and they would be

empowered by it just the same, even when the law was not written with them in mind. If anything, in communities with no clear ethnic identities, the comuna structure might actually be disempowering—it is a way for the government to wash their hands from the responsibility of providing for this particular set of people. It is easy to turn your back on someone if they are invisible. The comunas are decentralized and autonomous, their development is not the responsibility of the federal government or even the local government. Because they are given autonomy and right over their lands and their resources, it becomes their responsibility to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and develop their community. The invisible challenges faced by people living in the comunas are the reason why talking about the theory of WID, WAD, and GAD becomes especially relevant.

Furthermore, I chose to revisit these theories in my thesis because although the feminist literature on development does an excellent job in theorizing about poor rural women and has thoroughly defined concepts such as 'empowerment' and the 'feminization of poverty'—concepts that have been used to theorize on the experiences of women in "developing countries[1]"—, none of the articles that I have been able to find were written with Ecuadorian comuneras specifically in mind. Additionally, there is not an extensive literature on the intersections of development, gender, and communal lands.

[1] In my thesis, I will not use terms such as "First World vs. Third World" or "Developed vs. Developing" to categorize countries unless I am directly quoting or referring to a specific kind of literature. Using the term "Third World" to refer to lower income countries is outdated and in some cases even offensive; the usage of developed/developing falls into the narrative of development as a linear process that I challenge in this thesis. Due to the lack of an appropriate term, I will refer either to specific countries by name, use regions, or specify whether they were former colonies or former imperial powers.

This is another example on how the poor rural women living in Ecuador's comunas have fallen through the cracks of literature.

Development has historically been an area of contention in feminist theory, starting with the definition of development itself. Although development is a word that is constantly seen in a positive light (especially because it is often utilized in contexts such as the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals or other non-profits with the mission of improving the quality of life of a certain population), the reality is that not all theorists agree with the statement that development is inherently good. In order to understand feminist theories of development, it is important to first conceptualize development and its origins in liberal and modernization theory in the social sciences.

At its base, the liberal assumption is that development is a "linear, cumulative process, that it is expansionist and diffusionist. Additionally, in classic liberal theory, value differences—traditional versus modern—are central" (Jaquette 1982, 268). Under modernization theory traditional (undeveloped) societies must undergo a slow transition in order to become modern (developed) societies. Industrialization is by far the primary example of a process that a society, or a country, in theory must achieve in order to become truly modern. Nowadays, in the light of the adoption of the development paradigm by international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and others, the definition of development has expanded to include everything from sustainable energy sources to gender equality, although the inclusion the latter involved a long debate . However, its definition remains at its core as that of a process that separates

traditional and modern societies, the First and the Third World, developed and developing countries.

The different approaches to development as a concept, and the relationship of women and development processes, can best be understood by following the genealogy of feminist theories of development: WID, WAD, and GAD. These three theories blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s as challenges to earlier theories which were gender-blind and problematic. Most of today's gender-inclusive development frameworks are based on these theories.

Feminist Theories and Critiques of Development

Women in Development

In her pioneering 1970 book, *Woman's Role in Economic Development,* Ester Boserup argued that certain aspects of modernization where detrimental to women: urbanization and migration cut women off from their kinship support networks; women in the villages find fewer jobs in the modern sector; and the jobs that are available in the cities are often closed to women because of sex stereotyping. Boserup's research is widely understood to be the first time development was analyzed from a gender perspective; in fact, original theories of development and modernization had little to say about women. Development itself was seen as a sex-neutral process. If anything, the few scholars that wrote about the effect of development on women found only positive effects, such as the wonders of technology lessening women's domestic roles and bringing about the abolition of 'traditional values' that might have been oppressive

towards women (Jaquette 269). According to modernization theory, women had nothing to lose and everything to gain once their societies and their countries made the transition from traditional to modern. Most importantly, for WID theorists "any differences between male and female absorption into [the development process] are seen as failure of diffusion, not as a failure of the model itself" (Jaquette 1982, 269). Based on liberal feminist theory, feminist theories of development that fall under the WID label focus on advocating for women's fair share in development and do not critique the notion of development itself.

In *Woman's Role in Economic Development,* Boserup analyzed women's roles in rural villages (Part 1 on Agriculture), in cities (Part 2 on Industry), and examined the gendered dynamics of rural-to-urban migration, through labor, production, and income statistics mostly from African and Southeast Asian countries. This book was the first of its kind—it used hard data to make a case for women's place in development and therefore it is widely regarded as the foundation of the Women in Development theory. Boserup's contributions can be summarized in two statements: first, that the gender division of labor is a social construct that has changed throughout time and space; and second that the processes of (colonization) modernization have disempowered women because they (unlike men) have not been included in the development efforts (Benería, Berik, and Floro 2016). In order to make these arguments, Boserup provided examples such as that of the gender division of labor within African agriculture, where subsistence agriculture used to be mostly a women's job while men were in charge of felling, hunting, and warfare (Boserup 1970, 15-36). After the conquest of Africa, "Europeans,

accustomed to the male farming systems of their home countries looked with little sympathy on this unfamiliar distribution of the workload between sexes" and induced the "underemployed" male to participate in commercial agriculture (Boserup 1970, 19), successfully keeping women out of agricultural and economic development by relegating them to subsistence agriculture and other unpaid occupations. According to Boserup, "with modernization of agriculture and with migration to the towns, a new sex pattern of productive work must emerge, for better or worse" (Boserup 1970, 5). Boserup's nonconfrontational approach meant women ought to become better integrated into the new processes of development so that they can enjoy an equal share of the benefits of development as opposed to rethinking development itself.

WID theory places primary emphasis on egalitarianism and on the development of strategies and action programs aimed at minimizing the disadvantages of women in the productive sector and ending discrimination against them. Following Boserup's *Woman's Role in Economic Development,* the women's committee of the D.C chapter of the society for international development coined the term "women in development" to refer to their approach, and WID was soon adopted by American liberal feminists (Rathgeber 1990, 490). Grounded in traditional modernization theory, WID theory accepts the existing social structures and advocates for development as an inherently positive goal. The literature on WID focuses not on why women fared less well from development strategies, but on how they could be better integrated into such initiatives. Furthermore, WID theory analyzes exclusively on the productive aspect of women's work (both in

urban and rural areas), and does not take into account what would then become known as women's "reproductive work."

Although by the 1980s WID had been replaced as the dominant feminist theory of development, it marked the beginning of a new era in development planning and research in general. Today, most feminists would be the first ones to dismiss an approach like Boserup's to understand the lives of women, however the development field has been forever changed thanks to Boserup's work—even if today it feels outdated and even problematic at times. Benería, Berik, and Floro argue that, as a result of Boserup's work: "Now there are gender-differentiated datasets, gender-inclusive measures of well-being, and gender concerns and empowerment goals are integrated in the development policy [international] agenda" (Benería, Berik, and Floro 2016, 3). These are all things we take for granted today but that were not made possible until Boserup critiqued the gender-neutral approach to economic development. It also reminds us that the first step before we can construct an argument is to have the data to back it up.

Women and Development

Although by far the least popular of all three feminist theories of development, WAD's critique of its predecessor is key in understanding today's development planning and policy. Grounded in Marxist feminist theory, the WAD approach emerged in the second half of the 1970s as a response to the limitations of modernization theory and WID's lack of criticism of those theories. The theoretical base for writers of WAD is dependency theory, which is often referred to as the notion that resources flow from a

"periphery" of poor and underdeveloped states to a "core" of wealthy states, enriching the latter at the expense of the former (Rathgeber 1990, 492). For WAD theorists, it is not enough to demand equal access for women to the alleged benefits of development and modernization, but it becomes vital to critique development and modernization themselves as well as rethinking their impact on women's lives.

In "Accumulation, Reproduction, and 'Women's Role in Economic Development': Boserup Revisited", Lourdes Benería and Gita Sen deconstruct Boserup's book and set the stage for their 1982 article "Class and Gender Inequalities and Women's Role in Economic Development: Theoretical and Practical Implications", which along with Benería's 1979 "Reproduction, Production and the Sexual Division of Labour" is perhaps the most influential article published during the WAD's brief period as the leading feminist theory of development.

Benería and Sen find three major weaknesses in Boserup's work, which can then be extrapolated as WAD's critiques of WID theory. First, they argue that Boserup's book is essentially a collection of empirical data and is overly descriptive; it lacks a clearly defined theoretical framework. In short, the book fails to go beyond the data it presents (Benería and Sen 1981, 281-282). Second, there is an underlying argument that modernization is intrinsically good. Boserup's general argument is that women workers are marginalized in the process of economic development because their economic gains as wage workers, farmers, and traders are slight compared to those of male workers. Hence, "policy efforts should be directed to redress this problem, so that women share more fully in the fruits of modernization" (Benería and Sen 1981, 284). Boserup ignores

processes of capital accumulation set in motion during the colonial period and the effects of such processes on technical change and women's work. Nor does she systematically analyze the different effects of capital accumulation on women of different classes. Finally, Boserup fails to present a clear-cut feminist analysis of women's subordination. For Benería and Sen and WAD theorists, the role of reproduction as determinant of women's work, the sexual division of labor, and the subordinate/dominant relationships between women and men are missing from Boserup's book and WID theories at large.

Taking WID's shortcomings into account, WAD theorists argued that, not only do modernization and development's inherent benefits need to be reassessed but that "an analysis of women's role in the development process also requires a full understanding of their role in reproduction, and of its consequences for women's involvement in all aspects of economic life" (Benería and Sen 1982, 165). In short, it is not enough to seek the solution to women's oppression in economic and social relations in the public sphere, but the analysis of the domestic sphere is necessary to truly empower women. Otherwise, "the oft-repeated developmentalist goal of making women 'equal partners with men' in the development process is unlikely to be reached unless policies address women's participation in both the productive and reproductive spheres" (Benería and Sen 1982, 168). For example, women can never be equal partners with men if they are given the access to meaningful productive work outside of the home but are still expected to participate in non-remunerated housework; if anything, this doubles the women's responsibilities and hinders their development. One must keep this in mind when conducting research on the lives of Ecuador's comuneras. In the land of shared resources,

how are women's reproductive roles shared and/or expanded? How are the roles of women that belong to the larger families in the comuna different to those of smaller, lower-income families?

Benería and Sen suggest that development strategies "[focus] on the interaction between class and gender at all stages of the struggle for a more egalitarian society" (Benería and Sen 1982, 172). Thus calling for a restructuring of women's responsibilities both as wage workers and house workers. The authors use the example of poor, rural women in India who organized in the 1970s to lead demonstrations against insufficient wages and "the back breaking labor of government 'relief' programs of stone cutting and road building" (Benería and Sen 1982, 164). According to Benería and Sen, the reason why it was women at the forefront of the demonstrations was because they felt the consequences of the corrupt government in two ways: the backbreaking labor and the unavailability of food and water due to the doaught. Not able to feed their children or make sufficient wages to provide for their family, women organized to address a "joint [problem] posed by gender and class" (Benería and Sen 1982, 164). Although rudimentary, Benería and Sen argue that it is this kind of organizing mindset that development strategies should have.

Most genealogies of feminist theories of development tend to treat the WAD approach as "a necessary detour," which countered WID's embrace of modernization theory with an emphasis on women's exploitation as intrinsic to capitalism and colonialism (and neo-colonialism) but failed to sufficiently critique intra-class gender relations (Wilson 2015, 4). In many ways, WAD acted as the conduit for many socialist

feminists—most notably those who participated in groups like DAWN and Subordination of Women—to begin questioning the premises of WID, however WAD was soon replaced by the more popular Gender and Development theory.

Gender and Development

The GAD approach critiqued the tendency of WID—and sometimes even WAD–initiatives to treat "women" as a homogeneous category with common interests, and to promote policies which either addressed them in isolation or addressed all women equally, failing to recognize gender as a socially constructed and dynamic category (Wilson 2015, 4). Grounded in radical and postcolonial feminisms, GAD prescribed three changes to development theory (Jaquette 2017, 247): first, that gender relations become an explicit focus, so that men can be included in discussions surrounding development; second, that gender mainstreaming is implemented so that gender equality and development can be integrated into all programming; and finally, that participatory development is emphasized.

Widely regarded as one of the first theorists of GAD, in *Some Preliminary Notes on the Subordination of Women,* Ann Whitehead argued that "any study of women and development… cannot start from the viewpoint that the problem is *women*, but rather *men and women*, and more specifically the socially constituted relations between them" (Whitehead 1979, 10). Whitehead's analytical focus on the social constitution of gender relations is strongly based on Gayle Rubin's radical feminism, and focuses on the social practices that constitute and maintain relations of inequality and injustice. Whitehead's

decision to focus on "subordination," as opposed to "patriarchy," is meant to cover all forms of gender relations yet it makes the "general point that the character of gender relations is that of male dominance and female subordination" (Whitehead 1979, 12). Whitehead questioned the economic gender relations inside *and* outside of the house, arguing that a true feminist critique of development cannot ignore women's roles in the processes of reproduction (Brydon and Chant 1989; Whitehead 1979).

The GAD approach is meant to portray women as agents of change rather than as "passive recipients of development assistance" (Rathgeber 1990, 494), and it stresses the need for women to organize themselves politically. Most importantly, reminiscent of dual-systems theory, GAD theorists highlight "the importance of both class solidarity and class distinction [and argue] that the ideology of patriarchal capitalism operates within and across classes to oppress women" (Rathgeber 2003, 206). Consequently, GAD calls for a rethinking of capitalist structures *and* hierarchical gender relations, these changes will ultimately affect both men and women and thus the replacement of the term "women" by the term "gender" is necessary.

Caroline Moser's *Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs* in 1989 is another influential contribution to creating a framework for gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming, Moser points out in a follow up article co-written with Annalise Moser in 2005, is often defined along the lines of the UN Economic and Social Council's 1997 definition. "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all

levels" (Moser and Moser 2005, 12). Ultimately, the goal of gender mainstreaming must be gender equality. Caroline and Annalise Moser argue that gender mainstreaming ought to also include the institutionalization of gender concerns *within* the organization itself—hiring women in leadership positions, promoting gender equality amongst staff, etc.—and a notion of gender empowerment, which highlights the participation of women in decision-making processes and development initiatives.

As the prevalent, most recent version of feminist development the GAD approach provides a deeper analysis of structural oppression and disempowerment experienced by all, not just women. Furthermore, it "rejects the very foundations upon which international development assistance programs have been structured" (Rathgeber 1999, 204). By moving the focus away from the homogeneous category of "women" and towards an analysis of gender relations—the relationship of male dominance and female subordination, the gender disaggregated effects of dominant narratives of development and empowerment, etc.—the literature is more likely to successfully identify the needs of women and design relevant solutions. GAD theories focus both on the *position* (women's status in relationship to men, the social relations of gender and power) and the *condition* (their material state in terms of education, access to land, legal status, access to healthcare, etc.) of women (Rathgeber 1999, 206). Only by taking into account the material circumstances and the more intangible factors of gender relations, can we hope to achieve a complete analysis of women's quality of life. Although it is far from perfect, GAD serves as an excellent framework for future research on Ecuador's comuneras and the effects of collective land rights on non-indigenous people.

Poor Rural Women in Development

Taking into account the genealogy of feminist theories of development explored above, I continue with my goal of assessing development theories and programs in light of the lives of non-indigenous poor rural women in Ecuador's comunas, starting with a brief summary of the literature on development and rural women. Since there is not a vast amount of quality literature on the intersection of development and communal lands in Latin America, I will connect my themes and observations to those highlighted in the existing literature in this section, pointing out the gaps in the literature that remain to be filled.

In the article "Women, Entrepreneurship and Rural Development in Latin America and the Caribbean", Inmaculada Buendía-Martínez and Inmaculada Carrasco argue that rural development ought to be understood as a

> set of normative goals such as: reducing poverty; environmental sustainability; gender equality; revaluating of the fields, their culture and their people; facilitating the decentralization and social participation; overcoming the rural-urban divide; and guaranteeing the viability of peasant agriculture… It demands active participation from all agents (Buendía-Martínez and Carrasco 2013, 24).

Buendía-Martínez and Carrasco's piece fits into the development approach utilized by the United Nations and other similar organizations in which they argue the distribution of economic resources and the achievement of gender equality has ripple effects, changing the lives of not only the women but their entire communities. Taking into account that the

rural world is currently undergoing severe changes such as loss of land, a consequence of globalization, and the loss of rural society's lead-role in the world economy (Buendía-Martínez and Carrasco 2013, 25), the authors argue that the key to rural development is women's empowerment as it will assist in fulfilling all sustainable development goals. Ensuring the development of their entire community is a lofty responsibility for women, yet it is the dominant discourse in rural development programs and policies throughout international organizations.

In order to best understand feminist theories of rural development, I use the book *Women in the Third World: Gender Issues in Rural and Urban Areas*, in which Sylvia Chant and Lynne Brydon dedicate several chapters to rural women. Throughout the book, Brydon and Chant "draw upon studies based upon the subjective experiences of Third World women, rather than secondary sources such as government statistical reports or census data" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 1). According to the authors, census-data and similar materials "not only say little about the meaning of women's lives, but are also prone to gross inaccuracies, often under-recording women's activities or even excluding them altogether" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 1); this is one of the main themes that the authors use to explain the continuous failure of rural development programs. Furthermore, in their introduction, Brydon and Chant describe their overall approach as "pinned" to the feminist paradigm outlined in Benería and Sen's *Boserup Revisited* which is explored above. In particular, the arguments Brydon and Chant use as a framework for their book are that:

> the roots of women's oppression must be sought not only within the sphere of production but also reproduction, not only in economic structures but also in social and cultural structures, and that women's frequent loss of status in the course of economic development must be conceived in the context of an 'interweaving of class relations and gender relations' (Brydon and Chant 1989, 8).

Published in 1989, Brydon and Chant's book is very much a WAD approach. Not only do they focus on 'woman' as opposed to 'gender' as the basis of their analysis, but they critique modernization theory and emphasize the importance of women's reproductive work as well as their role in agricultural production.

In Chapter 4 "Gender and Rural Development Policy," Brydon argues the two main "themes" that contribute to the continuous failure of rural development policies are: first, the problematic conceptualization of women's work in rural environment, as well as the data and literature's neglect of the importance of women's productive and reproductive labor as vital components of agricultural production; and second that for a discipline that is constantly critiquing the negative consequences of 'outside influences' such as capitalism and colonialism, more often than not the development policies written for rural areas fall under the category of a negative 'outside influence' (Brydon and Chant 1989, 94). Brydon uses these themes to critique various examples of rural development policies and offer comments and conclusions on what future rural development programs should look like if they hope to have long-lasting positive effects.

Additionally, Brydon provides a useful timeline of rural development policies and programs and how they changed along with WID, WAD, and GAD. In the 1960s and early 1970s, development policies sought to improve productivity and address basic needs and living conditions in rural areas. According to Brydon, these programs had two major design faults: first, "they took little or no account of local knowledge of the environment and cultivation methods, and secondly, they tended to be addressed to household heads" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 96-97). During this time, the predominant model was that of the male household head, and development programs tended to address the males as breadwinners without taking into account the work done by the women to provide for the household. "It was generally assumed that women worked as part of their wifely duties, as something natural, as part of the marriage contract, which was therefore not open to discussion, negotiation or seen as having the potential for change in its own right" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 97). In summary, the dominance of positivist assumptions until the 1970s and the fact that development projects were based on national census data—in which women's work was neglected and households were (wrongly) the study units—, and the male identified head of the household was the person with whom the planners and their extension workers should communicate, were all reasons for the failure of development programs in rural areas before the early 1970s.

The emphasis began to shift in the 1970s when, largely thanks to Boserup's *Woman's Role in Economic Development* and the following WID literature, planners increasingly recognized women's contribution and participation "were crucial if development was to have permanent effects" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 100). In her book's

first chapter, "In the Village," Boserup offered empirical evidence that in rural areas, all producers tended to have crops cultivated for family consumption as well as cash crops, "men [would] play a more active part in the production of cash crops than in the production of food crops" (Boserup 1970, 10) while women tended to the subsistence agriculture plots. The gender dynamics changed, however, when technologies such as the plough were introduced and slowly family and food crops began to disappear, "women [then would] perform only purely domestic duties, living in seclusion within their own homes, and appearing in the village street only under the protection of the veil, a phenomenon associated with plough culture, and seemingly unknown in regions of shifting cultivation where women do most of the agricultural toil" (Boserup 1970, 13-14). This relegation of women into the private sphere was reinforced by the introduction of hired workers. "Female farming systems seem most often to disappear when farming systems with ploughing of permanent fields are introduced in lieu of shifting cultivation" (Boserup 1970, 20); in other words, modernization pushed women out of agricultural production.

Following Boserup and WID's watershed arguments that modernization and development were experienced differently by men and women, it quickly became clear women ought to be integrated into development planning. "The task facing planners was twofold: first, to uncover the range of work that women did, in a qualitative sense, and second, to find a way in which this work could be 'operationalized', made usable for survey techniques so that women's contribution could be quantified" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 100). In order to tackle this task and recognize the problems of large-scale farming schemes, export-oriented economies, and a move towards recognizing the unique needs

and wants of indigenous peoples, two approaches were created. In the Basic Needs approach, "proponents set out to find out what rural people need and to help them fulfill those needs" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 101-102). This approach is problematic when taking into account that there is no easy way to identify women's needs and even if these were to be identified the approach does not plan for the redistribution of resources between men and women. On the other hand, in the Farm Systems approach, which rose to prominence in the early 1980s, "rural households or other groups identified as production units by the scheme are regarded as systems within which there are sub-systems embracing different aspects of productive and reproductive work, but which are also integrated into wider community and regional systems" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 102). Such an approach allows for the recognition of women's contribution to all kinds of work (productive and reproductive) and can incorporate cultural evaluative elements. According to Brydon, this approach was a better fit for the requirements "both of economically-minded social scientists and cultural/socialist feminists, who stress the necessity of looking at relationships within the household" (Brydon and Chant 1989, 102). Participation and a bottom-up perspective are also integral components in both of these approaches to development.

Finally, Brydon critiques International Labour Organization's reports as well as other development programs/policy documents in the language they use when talking about women. According to Brydon, there will be studies that "focus entirely on the problems of and for women and development," (Brydon and Chant 1989, 102) such as Ahmad and Loutfi's, while at the same time (the same organizations) produce their wider

body of studies actively ignoring women in their analyses. “It is as if ‘real’ studies, about whole countries, need not be concerned with women at all, let alone especially focused on women, and only those concentrating on particular sectors, or written largely by women, may single out questions of gender as of specific importance” (Brydon and Chant 1989, 102). This poor approach to gender mainstreaming is echoed by Bettina Bock in *Gender Mainstreaming and Rural Development Policy: the Trivialisation of Rural Gender Issues*. By evaluating development statistics and programs in different rural areas in the European Union, Bock argues that “recognising the potentially competing frames of gender politics and rural development agendas might be more insightful [than blindly adopting gender mainstreaming policies] as it acknowledges the political nature of the task and its transformative goal” (Bock 2015, 731). Gender mainstreaming in rural development follows what Bock calls an “integrationist approach” by adding “something for women” to the agenda instead of writing an agenda/policy with women in mind. According to Bock, “this process of de-politicisation gives rise to the trivialisation of gender issues” and only through challenging the potential incompatibilities of gender equality and rural development, as opposed to avoiding conflict through gender mainstreaming, can a good policy be created.

Simply put, installing a policy for gender mainstreaming and demanding gender to be taken into account in all programs and policies is not enough. Women’s specific needs ought to be taken into account and this is not possible unless women—from different backgrounds, classes, races—are present in the policy-writing process so that rural communities can be benefited. Bock is careful to point out this approach “may be

interpreted as instrumentalising women" (Bock 2015, 740), but points out it also demonstrates the recognition of the relevance of gender equality for rural development. "This recognition, however, evaporates when gender mainstreaming is implemented in national programmes and projects. Gender equality is translated into women's projects and gender issues are trivialised and de-politicised as the need to support individual women to cope with rural life" (Bock 2015, 741). Bock argues that this approach to policy writting can also be used to perform deep evaluations of existing policy to "helps us to find out how gender is (re)produced through the hidden biases, presumptions and assumptions and the constructions and lived effects generated by policy texts" (Bock 2015, 741). Even if they were not written with gender in mind—either not actively aiming to empower or disempower women—programs, policies, and even laws can and must be deeply evaluated with a gender focus. It is my aim in this thesis to apply this approach to Ecuador's Ley de las Comunas.

New Perspectives Beyond WID, WAD, and GAD: The Future of Development

Jane Jaquette's main argument in "Women/Gender and Development: the Growing Gap Between Theory and Practice" is that the field of women/gender and development has lost dynamism, and the gap between the theory and the programs and initiatives it is supposed to inform has grown too wide. Jaquette argues that the feminists' longstanding bias against bureaucracy and neoliberal policies are hindering progress in areas of development. According to her, it is only through "true dialogue between women, practitioners, and theorists [that] women/gender and development [will achieve]

a renewed sense of purpose," (Jaquette 2017, 257). Other scholars agree that although the GAD approach reinvigorated the field in the 1980s, it is in need of a transformative approach.

For example, Kalpana Wilson takes a much more aggressive approach by arguing that gendered theories of development, specifically those that fall in the category of neoliberal frameworks, extend and deepen gender inequalities in order to sustain and strengthen processes of global capitalism, even if these development frameworks have co-opted the language of feminism and gender equality (Wilson 2015). Wilson calls for a redefining of development through a "radical re-appropriation of gender" from a framework of social reproduction that exposes the heteronormativity of neoliberal approaches and is based on an intersectional analysis. In a similar vein, Sylvia Chant recognizes that the co-option of feminist language and the so-called feminization of poverty has contributed to the inclusion of women in development policies and the creation of programs specifically designed to aid women (Chant 2004, 23-24). At the same time, Chant challenges the assertion that female-headed households are "the poorest of the poor"—a popular assertion in justifying GAD programming in low-income areas. Chant argues that, although it certainly does have some benefits, by promoting this false explanation, we continue not to solve poverty, as we are left unable to understand the true roots and origins of poverty if we blame it on female headship (Chant 2004, 20). It is through Wilson and Chant's critiques that we are able to understand the stakes of the co-optation of feminist development language as well as policy-making that is not fully based on evidence and an ever-evolving feminist theory of development.

Andrea Cornwall and Althea-Maria Rivas take a stab at reimagining a framework of GAD and women's empowerment that is focused on global justice. The new framework must have concepts of accountability, inclusion and nondiscrimination, and human rights so that it can "[release] us from the gross discriminatory essentialism that discourses of women's empowerment invite us to collude with, from the disregard of the violations of men's rights and the rights of trans, queer, gay, intersex and gender non/conforming people, from the misrecognition of the effects of neoliberalism and patriarchy on people of all genders and from the dystopia that 'investing in women' might lead us towards" (Cornwall and Rivas 2015, 14). Most of all, it takes us back to a recognition of our shared humanity, to the values of freedom, tolerance and shared responsibility, and to those very relationships – of solidarity, of collectivity, of struggle – that are so fundamental to achieving global justice and creating a better future for all.

Although there is an eagerness to criticize the shortcomings of early feminist theories of development and their role in perpetuating the dominant narratives of modernization as an inherently good linear process, it is key to understand the grand impact of these scholars in development programs and policies across the world. The domino effect set off by Boserup's 1970 book not only led to the UN's Decade of Women from 1975 to 1985, but also to the Beijing Declaration and Platform in 1996. International and institutional efforts towards fulfilling the goal of empowering all women would simply not be possible without the foundations set by early WID, WAD, and GAD theories.

Conclusion: Filling in the Gaps, Fixing the Cracks

When reading feminist theories of development written specifically to talk about poor rural women, I see many aspects of them that can be applied to a case study of the women living in comunas in the Ecuadorian coast. However, there still is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled as communal rights to land are usually not explicitly taken into account when writing about rural women and development. The literature on Ecuadorian women and gender empowerment does not fill in the gap either, as it rarely focuses on poor rural women, much less those living in communal lands. At the same time, the literature on Ecuador's comunas is for the most part "gender-neutral" and/or focuses on indigenous rights. If one had access to all of the literature in the world and yet did not pay a visit to Santa Elena's comunas and took the time to talk to the comuneras about their lives, their identities, and their comunas, it would be impossible for us to even know there is a subject to be studied. To me, Ecuador's comuneras were invisible until I visited them, talked to them, cooked with them, and took the time to understand the specific conditions of their lives. Whether Ecuador's comuneras are invisible/hidden by circumstance or by design, the reality is that there are thousands of women that share experiences similar to the ones I learned about in my interviews. Ecuador might not be a representative case for the rest of the world, perhaps not even the Latin American region, but it is an important reminder of the dangers of invisibility and the exclusion of certain voices.

The concept of negative invisibility ought to hang over our heads every day. What lives are not being counted by the census, what lives are allowed to be lived in poverty and isolation? The comuna structure in Ecuador, in addition to the country's lack of official information on the size and location of the population, has allowed the comunas, and particularly the women who live there, to remain out of sight and out of mind. Even when the people leave the country for the cities, in most cases they live in urban settlements so retired from the city center that the taxi drivers will charge you twice to even consider taking you there. The invisibilization that is made possible by the system is easily combatable by simply including a gender focus in the literature on Ecuador's comunas, by including rural women in the literature on Ecuador's women even if they are not organized as feminists, by including non-indigenous people in the discussion of communal lands in Ecuador. We must see these women and listen to them, in order to bring them out of invisibility.

Marianne H. Marchand asks: "Latin American Women Speak on Development: Are We Listening Yet?" The answer is no. In the 1999 book edited by Marchand and Jane L. Parpart, *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development,* there are multiple perspectives on the state of the literature on feminist theories of development and what the next steps should be. Marchand focuses on Latin American feminist theorists and comes to the conclusion that "not only is 'the personal political,' 'development is personal' as well (Marchand 1999, 71). Marchand advocates for women's testimonies as key components of postcolonial production of knowledge, specifically feminist theory. In order to create a feminist theory of development that can generate inclusive, informed, and progressive

development programs to benefit of Ecuador's comunas as well as theory that can be used in a re-reading of Ecuador's Ley de las Comunas from a gender perspective, one must go back to the source: the comuneras themselves. It is not enough to look at already existing feminist theories of development and pick and choose at the sections that might be relevant to our case. It is key to bring the women's voices into the narrative and into the theory to make sure it represents them and it takes into account the material conditions of their lives.

By starting from the stories the comuneras tell about their own lives and listening closely, this thesis has identified an important gap in the literature that (unknowingly or not) has left thousands of women out of the conversation of female empowerment and sustainable development. Most importantly, the this makes a case for *how* to fill this gap with literature that includes gender disaggregated data on employment, land access, political participation, leadership, etc.; derives directly from conversations with comuneras themselves; and is conscious of the intersectionality of women's (indigenous and not) identities. Only then, will the cracks be sealed in order to begin the work to ensure equal and just lives for Ecuador's comuneras.

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Appendix 1 – Ecuadorian Constitution (2008)
All mentions of comunas and their rights, translated

CHAPTER FOUR

Rights of communities, peoples, and nations

Article 56.- Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations; the Afro-Ecuadorian people; the Montubio people; and the comunas are part of the single and indivisible Ecuadorian State.

Article 57.- Comunas, indigenous communities, peoples and nations are recognized and guaranteed, in conformity with the Constitution and human rights agreements, conventions, declarations and other international instruments, the following collective rights:

1. To freely uphold, develop and strengthen their identity, feeling of belonging, ancestral traditions, and forms of social organization.
2. To not be the target of racism or any form of discrimination based on their origin or ethnic or cultural identity.
3. To recognition, reparation and compensation for community groups affected by racism, xenophobia, and other related forms of intolerance and discrimination.
4. To keep imprescriptible ownership of their communal lands, which shall be unalienable, immune from seizure, and indivisible. These lands shall be exempt from paying fees or taxes.

5. To keep ownership of ancestral lands and territories and to obtain free awarding of these lands.
6. To participate in the use, usufruct, administration, and conservation of renewable natural resources located on their lands.
7. To free prior informed consultation, within a reasonable period of time, on the plans and programs for prospecting, exploiting, and commercializing nonrenewable resources located on their lands and which could have an environmental or cultural impact on them; to participate in the profits earned from these projects and to receive compensation for social, cultural, and environmental damages caused to them. The consultation that must be conducted by the competent authorities shall be mandatory and in due time. If consent of the consulted community is not obtained, steps provided for by the Constitution and the law shall be taken.
8. To keep and promote their practices of managing biodiversity and their natural environment. The State shall establish and implement programs, with the participation of the community, to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.
9. To keep and develop their own forms of coexistence and social organization, and to create and exercise authority, in their legally recognized territories and ancestrally owned community lands.

10. To create, develop, apply, and practice their own legal system or common law, which cannot infringe constitutional rights, especially those of women, children and adolescents.
11. To not be displaced from their ancestral lands.
12. To uphold, protect, and develop collective knowledge; their science, technologies, and ancestral wisdom; the genetic resources that contain biological diversity and agricultural biodiversity; their medicine and traditional medical practices; including the right to restore, promote, and protect, ritual and holy places, as well as plants, animals, minerals, and ecosystems in their territories; and knowledge about the resources and properties of fauna and flora.

All forms of appropriation of their knowledge, innovations, and practices are forbidden.

13. To uphold, restore, protect, develop, and preserve their cultural and historical heritage as an indivisible part of Ecuador's heritage. The State shall provide resources for this purpose.
14. To develop, strengthen, and upgrade the intercultural bilingual education system, on the basis of criteria of quality, from early stimulation to higher levels of education, in conformity with cultural diversity, for the care and preservation of identities, in keeping with their own teaching and learning methodologies.

A teaching career marked by dignity shall be guaranteed. Administration of this system shall be collective and participatory, with rotation in time and space, based on community monitoring and accountability.

15. To build and uphold organizations that represent them, in the context of respect to pluralism and cultural, political, and organizational diversity. The State shall recognize and promote all forms of expression and organization.
16. To participate by means of their representatives in the official organizations established by law to draw up public policies concerning them, as well as design and decide their priorities in the plans and projects of the State.
17. To be consulted before the adoption of a legislative measure that might affect any of their collective rights.
18. To uphold and develop contacts, ties, and cooperation with other peoples, especially those that are divided by international borders.
19. To promote the use of garments, symbols and emblems that identify them.
20. To restrict military activities in their territories, in accordance with the law.
21. **T**hat the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and ambitions be reflected in public education and in the media; to the creation of their own media in their languages and access to the others without any discrimination.

The State will guarantee the fulfillment of these collective rights without any discrimination, and taking into account equality and equity between women and men.

Art. 60.- Ancestral and indigenous peoples, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Montubio peoples can establish territorial districts for the preservation of their culture. The law shall regulate their establishment. Comunas that have collective land ownership are recognized as an ancestral form of territorial organization.

TITLE V

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE STATE

Art. 248.- Communities, comunas, precincts, neighborhoods, and urban parishes are recognized. The law shall regulate the existence thereof so that they may be considered basic units of participation in the decentralized autonomous governments and the national planning system.

Appendix 2 – Interviews from Comuneras in Dos Mangas

All interviews conducted and translated by myself

Interview #1 – July 3, 2019 (translated from Spanish)

What does the word "tourism" mean to you?

What does tourism mean for me? I am not sure, but I will do what I can. I understand tourism involves many things, principally the human being—the foreigners, but also the people who are from our province because they also come visit our art and our handcrafts. Also, tourism is what makes our town well known, because people like you

come to do professional interviews for their degrees that are valuable for university students. Thanks to them, who come with the intention of learning from us, and we also learn from you about what tourism is and why it is valuable to us.

Also, tourism is what brings job opportunities not only to Dos Mangas but to different places all over the country. It is the foreigners that value our work, our art, the tagua and what its made from it, which can be found here in the forest. It's the raw material for our art and handcrafts.

Tourism involves many things, but I don't know a lot of it. I only have an elementary school education, but that was a long time ago. I never learned what tourism was from there. So, without any education, I notice tourism is what gives prestige to our town and other towns. Tourism is connected to the economy, because agriculture and fishing are not that prevalent anymore. Why am I saying this? Because over the past five years, we have had tourists from different places. Yesterday we had 40 foreigners from a university. They come to acquire new knowledge, and they take it back to their universities. It is thanks to them that there are publications about our towns, and thanks to them we value nature—the flora, the fauna, the howling monkeys, the natural pools, the waterfall. The ones that value nature are the tourists, but only the foreigners. No offense, but local tourists do not value nature. They want artificial pools, but not the foreigners. They value our nature and the honesty of our town. As you can see it is very peaceful, there is no fear that they will steal from you. I can leave my handcrafts here and go wash

my laundry, I only have to check in occasionally. That is the good part about our town, we can trust that we won't be robbed and tourists appreciate that.

For me tourism involves many things. It is what gives life to our lives.

Have you ever heard of ecotourism?

Yes, but I do not know what it means.

Do you get a lot of foreigners visiting Dos Mangas?

In Christmas and New Year, mostly. They come to visit Montañita, which is famous both nationally and internationally. We get lots of visitors that spend Christmas and New Year at Montañita but they don't come here until they are about to leave, and they stop by and buy handcrafts. Same during Easter, people stop by and take souvenirs with them. The low season is coming, tourists do not come from August to October, that's the low season. But in November, with the day of the dead, it comes up again.

I always tell the visitors that stop by to please promote our work and tell other tourists to come visit us. If no one comes I don't sell anything. And this helps, at least it helps me. It doesn't help that much, but what I do sell helps to help buy food for my children.

My husband right now is in Cuenca. He is with the Ministry of tourism of Santa Elena, promoting our waterfall, the pools, the handcrafts.

We don't want them to help us with money, we want promotion and visitors.

Have you always done handcrafts?

I have been doing this for six years, the jewelry is my creation.

My strategy is to open every day, sales or no sales I open. God forbid, we are blessed and I sell one or two dollars to buy bread for my children. I have two school-aged children. God blesses me and that is now I maintain my business. There are good and bad seasons, but I stay open.

My girl here, she watches the shop in the afternoon. She cooks in the morning and comes here in the afternoon and I can go work in the house.

What changes have you noticed in Dos Mangas since tourism started?

I have noticed many changes because we used to exploit the forest so much. People didn't care about cutting down a tree, even if monkeys lived there. But since they made a

partnership with Sociobosque, we are given an annual financial incentive to preserve our forest. We can be given a special permit to cut down trees for personal use, I think.

I have seen changes there, we don't exploit the forest. At first, when the partnership was first started, my husband was the president of the comuna, that's why I know this. It was a long process, people were not adapting to the new rules. But that that they have developed conscience, people take advantage of all parts of the tree. I think people realized they had to adapt because there was a drought period and people realized it was because they were exploiting the forest and the river.

Today, they are artisans instead, there didn't use to be any. We weave and make jewelry. Before we used to cut down the tagua trees [and not use the tagua for handcrafts]. It was worth it, without these efforts we would have a desolated Dos Mangas. Now there are values, we value nature and we value ourselves. Now we value what we have, but we didn't use to because no one taught us to. In school no one taught me to value nature, but now they do teach that at school.

Interview #2 – July 3, 2019 (translated from Spanish)

What does the word "tourism" mean to you?

People come to visit the waterfall, to buy the handcrafts.

Have you ever heard of ecotourism?

No, I haven't.

How long have you been weaving paja toquilla?

About 20 years now.

What changes have you noticed in Dos Mangas since tourism started?

Less garbage in the streets, also we have a new and clean highway. This was done by the government of Santa Elena.

Have you noticed any changes in the lives of women since tourism started?

It is all the same, nothing has changed [laughs].

Interview #3 – July 4, 2019 (translated from Spanish)

This interview took place at the tourism office (caseta) in Dos Mangas with one of the secretaries. Her job is to manage the tours, welcome the visitors, and keep records of the tourists and guides for Santa Elena's Ministerio de Turismo

What does the word "tourism" mean to you?

To show the audiences, national or international, what we have to offer. Such as eco-friendly tourism.

Have you ever heard of ecotourism?

It is a version of tourism that has to do with conservation. We have to take care of the environment.

Tell me a little bit more about the organization of the tourism here in Dos Mangas.

We have a roster of tour guides, three per day. When the tourists arrive we give them boots, take some information for our records, and then give them some background. We recommend them to visit the waterfall and pools, and invite them to buy handcrafts.

How long have you been working here?

One year.

Why did you decide to work as the secretary?

It is a job [laughs]. A lot of people here do not have jobs but this is a good one. And also to learn more about tourism.

Do you know when this office was built?

Since the year 2000.

Do you know whose idea it was to built the office?

It was a foundation's idea, ProPueblo I think. I believe that it was the Ministerio de Turismo that made an initiative to build the tourism here, with the help of the comuna's directives—the president, the vicepresident, etc.

Are you originally from Dos Mangas?

Yes.

What changes have you noticed in Dos Mangas since tourism started?

I have noticed many changes, but we need a lot more. In my opinion we have to organize ourselves better. The tour guides need to be better organized and the community too.

Have you noticed any changes in the lives of women since tourism started?

Entrepreneurship mostly. Especially with the handcrafts, women can do that instead of staying at home.

What do you think should be the role of the government in community-based ecotourism ventures like this one?

Well, we don't really get much help from the government. We could use administrative help so we can organize ourselves better and aspire to more, so that we are not stuck.

What do you think should be the role of women in community-based ecotourism ventures like this one?

We should be more united, we should also receive trainings. We need to realize how beautiful our community is and how to value it.

During our tour, there were two high school students with us. Could you tell me a little more about the apprenticeship process?

They are high school students from Dos Mangas and other comunas. They study tourism and are doing their apprenticeships. They come from a school in Manglaralto, they send us students for a month-long apprenticeship. When they graduate, they get other jobs though. The economy is difficult right now, so they don't come back to work here.

Interview #4 – July 4, 2019 (translated from Spanish)

What does the word "tourism" mean to you?

The word "tourism" encompasses many things. In Dos Mangas, they thought us that tourism is what we offer. It is what we have, what we are, where we live. We make tourism. Tourism means visitors that come and go or stay. We, for example myself as the owner of this store, we have to be nice towards the visitors. We have to be kind so they will start a chain and tell other people they have to visit Dos Mangas. So they will recommend us.

Have you ever heard of ecotourism?

Yes, it is about making sure others know what we have and get to know the environment—what it is like and how to conserve it.

What changes have you noticed in Dos Mangas since tourism started?

Tourism in Dos Mangas is about 34 or 38 years old. Before we sold crafts we started with the hiking trails, that was the beginning. After that we began to craft. There have been a lot of changes because now there are many families that do crafts for a living, and even if the economic situation hasn't changed dramatically it has changed enough for us to survive and take care of our families, for us to be able to educate our childen. Many families depend on their crafts.

There has been a change because since we are doing tourism we have to be able to feed the tourists as well. So we have stores, we sell water bottles and candy. We also benefit from that. That is tourism to me.

There have been many changes. The youth, well they promote us too. They have realized that it is a great advantage for us and that if we don't promote ourselves we are nothing.

Have you noticed any changes in the lives of women since tourism started?

That question has a lot of angles. Because before, we women got married so young and we only lived to raise children. But now, and I can tell you from experience, we keep ourselves busy with our stores. Ever since I started working I thought to myself: “maybe I will have three kids only, maybe I won’t have 12 kids” [laughs]. Because you know, women used to have like 12 kids.

I believe tourism has helped us because women receive training now. The government and others come train us on how we should live, what we should do, how to raise and educate our children. The women participate now.

For example, here in the comuna, only the men were comuneros. We the women… not so much. It was not like the men said “No, no, you can’t participate,” but we thought it was a man thing. Only men participated in the comuna meetings. But when we started learning, the change was big. They told us: “you matter, you women have feelings and thoughts, you also have to participate with ideas in your society. It is good for you to participate. Don’t let only men participate, because when it’s only then they can only speak from there perspective. And who is looking out for you? No one. So you have to participate.”

So I became a comunera, I started going to the meetings. And from that moment other women followed my lead. I have three daughters and they are all comuneras… and they are all educated. Thanks to this job I have I could educate my daughters. One of them is a

teacher, the other a graphic designer, the other one is a gynecologist… and it's all thanks to this job, because here women have no other jobs. So many women here focus on crafts and their family.

What do you think should be the role of the government in community-based ecotourism ventures like this one?

Well, as a comuna, we have been supported a lot by the municipality and the prefectura. Mostly by promoting us, They have helped us with the material to fix our hiking trails and bring visitors. Yeah, they have helped us a lot. For example, right now there is a tourism caravan going around Ecuador and other countries, and there is one member of our comuna promoting Dos Mangas. After caravans like this, visitors do come, there are results.

Could you tell me a little bit more about the comuna? How is it organized?

We have a leadership for the comuna, we have a president, a vice president, a secretary, a treasurer and a syndic, who is like the lawyer. Aside from them five, there is a delegation that is focused on the people, they focus on health, promoting initiatives in the comuna, sport… etc. That is how we organize ourselves.

The president is in charge of filling out forms and making sure projects work. The vice president helps him, or he leads comuna meetings if the president is not there. The treasurer manages the money, but since we no longer do trade as a comuna is different. But for example, say a tree falls over (because we can't cut them anymore), or we sell a cow, then the treasurer gets and manages the money. And, for example, he collects our contribution to the comuna, right now every comunero is paying five dollars a year. The treasurer makes sure that the comuna does not owe money, they pay our dues to the Federación de Comunas, where all comunas are affiliated.

How do you elect the comuna president?

It's once a year, and everybody gets called in. But before picking a president we get called into a special meeting (we meet every month usually), and in that meeting we are told about the election. This is normally in December, so that the new government can start working in January. All the comuneros get called in, because to be able to vote we have to be up to date with our fees: the annual dues I was talling you about, and the death fee. Because we have a contribution for when people die… like, if I died for example, my family has to receive $170 because there are 170 comuneros afiliados. We pay one dollar when people die so we can help out the family.

So we have to be up to date in our payments. If someone owes one dollar they can't vote.

And then we vote. The people run together, if I wanted to be president I would have to come in with a list—my vice president, my secretary, my treasurer… and then they vote. The vote is secret.

Now, going back to you. How long have you had this shop for?

Like 28 years… or more [laughs].

Were you one of the first ones? One of the first craft shops?

Mine was the first shop in Dos Mangas.

I've been told there used to be an Asociación de Mujeres Artesanas. What do you know about that?

Yes… I started it. In the year 2000, I started a women's association. For eight or 10 years, a group of women and I worked together informally. We kept each other company and helped each other. So I made the association to make things better, to make sure all women had access to a craft. We would be able to divide the activities, some could dry the paja toquilla, some others would dye it, some would weave, some would work the tagua, or cook, or sell… that was my vision. I began the association.

And, for like eight years or so, the association worked out well. We went to the fair, we sold our products. I started the association because I had a dream of a different community, where women got together and had jobs. I, as the organizer, got display cases for our products, built the space we had, built the restaurant. I got our tools and our machines.

That was my dream, that women had an alternative so they didn't have to stay at home… but it didn't work. The women who were working tagua didn't want to do just tagua, the cooks didn't want to cook… there was trouble. And I administered the association for eight years as president. I abandoned my family, my husband was mad and he always said "you only want to be at the association. I'm going to bring you your clothes and your bed, so you can live there." It was hard… and the women, they didn't let me help them.

So I quit, I gave them my resignation letter because I couldn't do it anymore, I had abandoned my family. I moved away, and ever since I left the association doesn't do anything, they don't produce anymore. I am sure they owe money or dues. But I went back home, I focused on my own thing, I didn't want anyone to bother me. I work by myself and the association dissolved.

And when I say dissolved it isn't formally, the association exists on paper, but the women don't get together, the space is abandoned. The restaurant is open but it's just one woman

that runs it now, they were supposed to rotate so that different women had access to a job, but she's been there for years…

When you were president, how many women were in the association?

There was 26 women. But you know how women are [laughs]. They have the space, they have the restaurant, they have the association… but they won't do anything with them.