

THE ILLUSION OF GETTING A JOB:
WOMEN'S WORK ON FLOWER PLANTATIONS
(A CASE FROM ECUADOR)

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by

Marcela Enriquez Vasquez

To my children Samik and Misael: intrepid readers,
tireless naturalists, and lovely supporters of my academic experience in Florida.

To my mother Dalila Vásquez, from whom I received the best lessons on feminism.

With love.

MEV

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ABSTRACT	ix
CHAPTER	
1 METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS	1
Research Question	1
Methodology	3
Fieldwork Explanation	6
Mulauco: Study Site	9
2 INVISIBLE BUT INDISPENSABLE: WOMEN'S WORK AT HOME	15
Women and Work: Always Together but Not Always Recognized	16
Latin American Peasant Women: Household and Work	22
3 FAMILY AND GENDER RELATIONS IN THE ANDEAN CONTEXT	26
Family and Society in a Modern Context	26
Family and Gender Relations in the Andean World	27
Equality in Gender Relations	28
Inequality in Gender Relations	30
Complementary Gender Relations	32
Gender Relations and Cultural Traditions	36
Gender Relations in Mulauco: An Overview	39
4 GLOBALIZATION AND NTAEs: THE CASE OF THE FLOWER INDUSTRY IN ECUADOR	46
Economic Crisis and the Emergence of the Non-Traditional Agricultural Exports, (NTAEs)	47
Flower Agribusiness: The Most Successful NTAE in Ecuador	52
The NTAEs and Peasant Women Households	57
The Gender-Oriented Work Force in the Restructuring of International Industry	60

5	THE WORK OF PEASANT WOMEN IN FLOWER AGRIBUSINESS: THE CASE OF THE COMMUNITY OF MULAUCO IN THE ECUADORIAN ANDES	65
	The NTAEs and Female Work: Experiences from Latin America.....	65
	Household and Subsistence Economy Disruption in Mulauco.....	67
	Leaving Home to Ensure Subsistence: Women’s Decision to Work on Flower Plantations	70
	Flower Employment and Daily Life: Vignettes.....	73
	Teresa	74
	Maria.....	77
	Zoila.....	82
6	EMPOWERMENT OR ADAPTATION? HOW JOBS IN THE FLOWER INDUSTRY AFFECT THE FEMALE WORK FORCE IN MULAUCO	87
	Impacts of the Flower Industry in Ecuador	87
	Which Outcomes are of Interest for Women Workers?	92
	Are Female Workers from Mulauco Being Empowered by Their Jobs in the Flower Industry?	94
	The Impact of Employment on Women Workers.....	95
	Family, Communal and Personal Gains/Looses of Women.....	103
7	CONCLUSIONS	107
	The NTAEs and Women: a Link at Stake	107
	Empowerment / Disempowerment	109
	Income	110
	Stability, Career Opportunities and Experience	111
	Social Networks.....	111
	Knowledge.....	112
	Social Security.....	112
	Is Flower Employment an Illusion for Women?	113
	Suggestions for Future Studies	115
APPENDIX		
A	QUESTIONNAIRE TO INTERVIEW WOMEN FLOWER WORKERS	117
B	CUESTIONARIO PARA TRABAJADORAS DE FLORICULTORAS.....	119
C	LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED.....	121
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	122
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	132

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
1 Flowers at a glance in Ecuador	53

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
1 Mulauco: Study site.....	10
2 Family, communal, and personal gains/losses of women	105

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Chair: Anthony Oliver-Smith

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My study examined the effects of the flower industry (a Non-Traditional Agriculture Export (NTAE) or high-valued agriculture) on the women of Mulauco, a small Andean community in Ecuador. The NTAEs emerged because of the structural adjustment policies ordered by the International Monetary Fund to equilibrate the national economies of Latin American countries.

The flower industry, which appeared in the mid 1980s promoted massive employment of rural women. Since most of these women had no previous work experience, my goal was to show the effects of the transition from nonpaid home activities to waged capitalist work. This transition is important for anthropology, because it implies several socioeconomic transformations in which women become involved. Among these transformations is the suppression of the social system in which the women were highly involved, before they became waged workers. This socio-economic system

was based on subsistence agriculture, which provided livelihoods for peasant families for centuries, in Andean rural areas.

Although work experience provides some benefits to women (cash resources, increased self esteem, and greater confidence), the lack of stability, social security, and other elements of empowerment could turn women's involvement in paid work into an illusion.

CHAPTER 1 METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research Question

For centuries, women were simply nonexistent as a socioeconomic factor. When governments around the world implemented development programs based on the theory of *modernization*, women were neglected. Because women were responsible for subsistence activities at home, women's work was not considered relevant. Although such subsistence responsibility is an enormous contribution of women to development efforts in all countries, this work was ignored in official statistics. This is what feminist literature calls the invisibility of women.

Feminist concerns about the lack of real work opportunities for women, are experiencing a change. In the last two decades, women (especially peasant women) have been involved in waged work in most of the less-industrialized countries. For that reason, the invisibility of women has evolved into "women as a target of development," the focus of my study. My study aimed to determine whether the available work opportunities contribute to bettering women's situation and their social and family environments.

Framed in these concepts, my study examined the impact of the Ecuadorian flower agribusiness on the gender and family relations of peasant women workers. My hypothesis was that income from labor in the flower industry promoted socio-economic participation of women and caused some changes in gender and family relations; but it

does not promote sustained equity in the household. My study addressed the following research questions:

1. Why are women more likely than men to work in flower agribusinesses?
2. Are economic and material improvements from employment in flower production transforming the traditional duties at home?
3. Do the earnings from employment allow female workers to improve their family's welfare?
4. Does employment in flower production contribute to greater equity in decision-making relations in the family? Is employment in the flower industry promoting equity in gender relations?

To analyze the involvement of women in paid work and its effects on gender and family relations, I reviewed the most relevant literature on the involvement of women in capitalist labor relations, and the rise of so-called nontraditional agricultural exports (the economic process of which flower agribusiness is part). Then I examined whether women are likely to improve their undervalued social and family situation and overcome inequalities through involvement in paid work.

By working in flower agribusiness, women gained temporary equality and spending power, and achieved some economic relief for their families. The temporary gender equality that flower agribusiness wages promote is a kind of illusion for women. Such a benefit is not sustained, because women cannot make careers as flower workers. Sooner or later, they lose the job because of the institutional needs of flower agribusiness to replace workers, and because of the exhaustion that the work produces in women. Thus the women lose their temporary source of well-being. In addition, the psychological freedom from male control that women experience when they are workers is not real. They use the work as an excuse to escape patriarchal control; but even when they are

working, they are subject to the continued control of the flower company, which does not allow them to interact with other workers or even to talk during work time.

Thus, despite the positive material effects, the involvement of women in paid work means an ideological reinforcement of gender inequalities, and ultimately of the patriarchal bias of the system.

Methodology

Anthropological work is never about the study of a fixed set of social situations. Instead, it is about the endless process of interactions in which people engage with social or natural systems. This means that the strategy for studying these interactions should never be the same. Every study should be designed on a case-by-case basis. Bernard (2002:408) said, “anthropologists have been prodigious inventors, consumers, and adapters of research methods.” When researching social groups, it is important to assume this to avoid the stress of trying to apply a fixed methodology (following its suggestions step by step).

Planning my study became an introspective activity. A nonstop chain of questions and answers about important and unimportant details began to emerge. I began to wonder how to present the people who were the main target of my study; and how I could obtain the information I needed. Thus, my first task was to understand methodological issues. Hardin (1987) said that methodology is any technique used to collect evidence; which at its basic level includes “listening to others, observing behavior, or examining historical records” (Hardin 1987 cited by Whaley 2001:420). These three basic methods guided me in determining the formal or material part of the method I should use.

As a formal methodological structure, I planned to apply semi-structured interviews and to take field notes of my interviews, and also of relevant issues I could observe or

reflect on during my work. Before the field study, I prepared a questionnaire in which I emphasized obtaining a social “picture” of the women I dealt with (Appendix A). As I will explain later, this questionnaire was easily exceeded by the testimony of the women interviewed, whose dialogues were filled with reflections on their own situation.

My main methodologic concern was on the conceptual framework in which I should listen to and interview people during my study. My conviction was stated by Pini (2003: 422): the “lived experiences of women represents a legitimate form and source of knowledge;” a research project on women must aim to promote social change. Inevitably these convictions led me to a feminist perspective. To justify this perspective, I must explain why a feminist point of view is needed in this kind of research.

Some social scientists argue that no special affinity exists between feminism and a particular research method. For example, while reflecting on the issues about method, methodology, and epistemology used by social scientist to analyze women, Hardin (1987:4) said “feminists have argued that traditional theories have been applied in ways that make it difficult to understand women's participation in social life, or to understand men's activities as gendered (vs. as representing the human)”. Wondering how to correct the partial and distorted accounts in the traditional analyses, Hardin asked “is there a distinctive feminist method of inquiry?” Only three methods of social inquiry (listening to or interrogating informants, observing behavior, and examining historical traces and records) are used by both women and men. Hardin said that although there is not a distinctive feminist method of research, it is possible produce to less partial and less distorted descriptions, explanations, and understandings of women’s issues.

In contrast to Hardin's viewpoint, several social scientists (Reinharz 1992, Bloom 1998) think that a feminist method exists to address issues involving women. This method, which "promises a more interpersonal and reciprocal relationship between researchers and those whose lives are the focus of the research," is better able "to break down barriers that exist among women as well as the barriers that exist between the researcher and the researched" (Bloom 1998: 2-3). A particular facet of the feminist method is that it is a "way to know something", and also a way to "change something" in the sense that feminism seeks to overcome a particular situation of social inequality (Armstead 1995, cited in Pini 2003: 419).

My goal was to study a group of rural women and how a particular social process has affected them. Therefore I was convinced that a feminist method is the most appropriate approach to my study. Moreover, since the focus of my study was to understand the output of a female social practice, using exclusively the viewpoint or testimony of those women involved in such an experience, the most appropriate way to obtain information was through interviews.

Bloom (1998) said that interviewing is a central process to research relationships in feminist methodology, particularly when the focus is on collecting personal narratives. Furthermore, Reinharz (1992) said that the basis of feminist methodology is the conviction that "for a woman to be understood in a social research project, it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by a woman."

Once I began fieldwork I had to become flexible enough to adapt my methodology to the real situations I encountered. For example, it was not possible to formally interview all of the women flower workers. By "formal" interview I refer to having a

conversation in a given place where both the parties involved could more or less follow a guide for such interviews. I had previously prepared a questionnaire for the interviews, but the interviews with these women turned into narratives in which they expressed their experiences. Thus, I could not restrict these women to answering only my questions. Then I understood that in this way of answering, they enriched me with more information than what I asked for. Therefore instead of trying to follow my interview questions, I encouraged them to freely express their point of view. Under these circumstances, I was forced to alternate between semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

The feminist perspective used proved to be effective when the interviews turned into friendly conversations between two women who shared similar concerns and needed to express their feelings.

Fieldwork Explanation

Concurring with the reflections on methodology, this study is based on qualitative data collected during fieldwork carried out in Ecuador between July and August of 2003 in the rural Comuna of Mulauco, where semi-structured and unstructured interviews of women flower workers were conducted. In addition to these workers, I also interviewed some relatives of women flower workers, flower entrepreneurs, and scholars or officers related to the flower industry. In total, I interviewed 20 people, including seven women flower workers, and one former women flower worker; two flower agribusiness representatives, and relatives of these workers.¹

The semi structured and unstructured interviews were a particularly useful tool for research because they permitted the interviewed women workers to express themselves freely, and allowed me to explore particular details provided by these workers that I

¹ See Appendix B for a list of interviewed people.

considered important for my work. This method was beneficial in achieving an ideological identification with the interviewed women workers and an egalitarian relationship among interviewer and interviewed.

Semi structured or unstructured interviewing, says Reinharz (1992: 18), “differs from ethnography in not including long periods of researcher participation in the life of the interviewee and differs from survey research or structured interviewing by including free interaction between the researcher and interviewee.” These characteristics of the method chosen proved to be effective during my work. In this way, I could use effectively the often-limited time of the flower women workers. Some of them I interviewed on the way back to their homes. Due to the sensitive nature of the issues that women flower workers have to face, some of the interviews I did became a narrative experience for the women flower workers interviewed. Talking about their problems with someone really interested in knowing them made the women flower workers feel more comfortable. As a result they engaged in monologues about their lives, frustrations, and hopes. This situation is what Cotterill (1992: 604) defines as indicators of friendship, which occurs when “having someone to confide in and knowing that person will listen sympathetically to what you have to say,” and of reciprocity in that “confiding and listening are usually shared activities between close friends. . .” Of course, clarifies Cotterill (1992: 599). “close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say and then disappear”.

Through the use of the methodological approach described, I could maintain my role of researcher, sharing my feelings with women and providing solidarity to other women. The interviews I did allowed me to understand the women workers’

manifestations of agency and their achievements. They exercised a high degree of agency when negotiating, managing, and prioritizing demands made by the new socio-economic scenario they had to face as workers in a capitalist activity. Thus, when women workers were interviewed, they not only answered my questions, but they also shaped the conversations, to express everything they deemed important to talk about. They often did not offer direct answers to my questions, but the majority of the time I obtained information that I had not considered but which allowed me to better understand the changes evoked by their work on the flower plantations. Interestingly enough, in some cases, the women's husbands were also present during the interviews and they, like me, learned about an unknown reality because their wives had never discussed it with them.

To experience for myself the things I heard from the women workers, I visited a flower agribusiness company where I was able to observe the women's work site and meet the manager and owner² of that company. I also interviewed a flower trader centered in Quito with business connections in the US and Italy, from whom I learned of the exchange processes and trade logic of the product. During my work, I felt that all the people I met were in a kind of race for profits. Unlike other export businesses in Ecuador, flower cultivation is highly demanding, precise, and unstable. To maximize profits, it is necessary to carry out all operations in as little time as possible. To race against the clock, both flower products and markets are quite fragile and must be handled with extreme care.

² This flower plantation is called Arcoiris, and is located in Alpalagal de Acurio.

Mulauco: Study Site

This study was conducted in the rural Comuna of Mulauco located about 40 Km east of Quito, the Ecuadorian capital³ (Figure 1). Administratively the *Comuna* Mulauco is part of the parochial seat of Pifo,⁴ which is within the Metropolitan District of Quito. Besides Mulauco, there are other communities in Pifo. These are Virginia, Sigsipamba, and Tablón, which are located in the flanks of the Real or Oriental (East) cordillera.

Pifo is part of the Tumbaco–Guayllabamba valley complex, which surrounds Quito at the Eastern and Northern part of this city. Due to altitude, weather, and soil conditions, this valley has developed an important agriculture activity, and since the 1970s, flower plantations have used this valley. According to the flower agribusiness trade association this area of Quito encompasses 24.9% (812 hectares or 2,092 acres) of the total area of flower plantations in Ecuador. Quito and other cantons of the same province⁵ share 62% of the national flower plantation area estimated in 3,262 hectares (7,828 acres) (Expoflores 2003).

The Comuna of Mulauco⁶ is mainly composed of descendents from indigenous workers of the surrounding hacienda⁷ Mulauco.

³ As part of my study, I also visited the area of Alpamalag de Acurio located 100 km south of Quito, where I visited a flower plantation and met its manager.

⁴ Pifo is a rural parish located at the North East part of Quito, 35 kilometers from this city. Pifo lies at latitude: 0°13'60 S, and longitude of 78°19'60 W. Its altitude is 2770 m, and its average temperature is 12°C. Pifo's population is 9,005 inhabitants, with a density of 01-05 inhabitants per hectare (1 hectare = 2.4 acres) See: Quito, Distrito Metropolitano, <http://www.quito.gov.ec/municipio/administraciones/madzpifo.htm>.

⁵ Quito belongs to the Pichincha province.

⁶ For the Description of the Comuna Mulauco I use the information gathered from my interviews with the following people, member of the Comuna Mulauco: Susana Quilumba, Patricio Collahuaso, Maria Dianacallo, and her father Jose Dianacallo. Susana Quilumba is a former flower worker, and Patricio Collahuaso still works in the flower industry.

⁷ *Hacienda* is a big piece of land (usually more than 150 acres), dedicated to growing products for local and regional consumption. Traditionally indigenous people, who lived with all their families in small parcels named *huasipungos*, composed *haciendas'* labor force. *Haciendas'* production system became obsolete

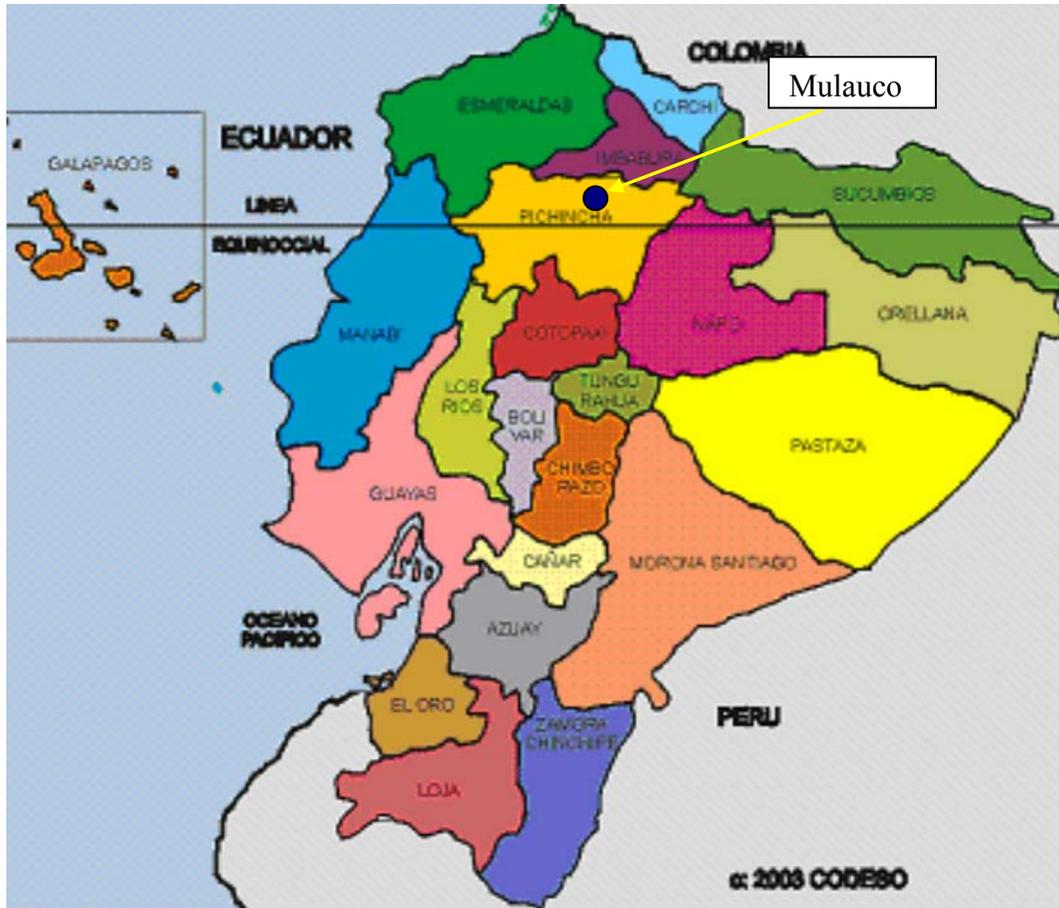


Figure 1. Mulauco: Study site

The Ecuadorian Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonization⁸ divided this hacienda in the mid 60s as part of its program of land redistribution. Hacienda Mulauco was a big estate dedicated to cattle ranching and some products like potatoes, corn, and onions, which were sold in Quito and other towns at the weekly fairs. Due to the *social pressure*,⁹ the agrarian reforms process¹⁰ promoted by the Ecuadorian government in 1964 affected

and owners eventually sold their land to high intensive capital agriculture or converted them into tourist resorts and other economic activities linked with new economic paradigms.

⁸ Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización, IERAC. This organization was changed by the current Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario (INDA).

⁹ *Social pressure* was one of the conditions of the Agrarian Reform Law to affect rural lands. It consist in the existence of high number of people without land around poorly used estates.

¹⁰ This process was aimed to redistribute lands among peasants, the ban of non-capitalist work relations in rural areas, and to promote the economic use of agriculture lands. Under the agrarian reform law, when a

this hacienda by 1966.¹¹ As a result, part of the Hacienda Mulauco was distributed among the *huasipungueros*,¹² who created the *Comuna* Mulauco, and the rest remained in the hands of its owner's successors.

The *Comuna* Mulauco distributed land plots among its family members. These plots' extensions varied between 4 to 6 acres, but now due to the inheritance process, they are smaller. Currently the *comuna* has about 500 inhabitants. After the creation of the *Comuna*, some people continued working for the remaining *haciendas* of the area, but most were completely involved in subsistence agriculture. The household livelihood strategy in Mulauco was based in subsistence agriculture, in which all the people were involved. Due to economic constrictions such a strategy eventually was combined with increasing employment since the early 1980s. Nowadays, the household economy in Mulauco does not depend on local agriculture but on external artisan employments, principally in Pifo, and other towns in the valley, and even in Quito. Flower plantations located in the Pifo's area, and housekeeping, are the main employment sources for women from Mulauco.

Mulauco has one elementary school where children of the area attend from 7 am to 2 pm every weekday. Besides the *comuna* organization, the *Comite de Padres de Familia* of the school, is a place to gather people from the community.¹³ During these meetings parents receive children's reports and organize school festivities. The dominant religion in Mulauco is Christian. There are two churches, one Catholic and another one

estate was not used in full, the unused land was targeted for expropriation and redistribution among local peasants. Normally the benefited peasants were workers of affected estates or haciendas.

¹¹ Interview with Susana Quilumba.

¹² *huasipungueros*, "peasants who contributed permanent quotas of labor in exchange for small subsistence plots (called *huasipungos*) and low wage supplements" (Zamosc 1990).

¹³ The comite gathers at least once every trimester (Ecuadorian school system is divided in three trimesters that go from October to June).

Protestant, where masses are carried out on Sundays (at 10 am the Protestant, and at 5 pm the Catholic). Generally Sunday morning is used by the “Mulauquenses” to go to Pifo for grocery shopping.

When an economic crisis started in the country in the mid 1980's,¹⁴ Mulauco's peoples experienced a shift in their economic patterns: from working in subsistence and small-scale agriculture to more urban activities. Like many rural families in the highland Ecuadorian Andes, they have had to look outside their Comuna for additional earnings. The most affected were urban and rural people without permanent jobs. The inhabitants of Mulauco lacked sufficient land to generate family income through agriculture. Therefore, they searched the urban areas for something that could offer a wage to bring home. The primary family income came from work carried out by the men in Quito or surrounding areas as masons, carpenters, plumbers, and other more seasonal work. Women, who up until then had worked primarily at home caring for domestic animals and small crops, also had to find some income-generating occupation and thus, they got involved in housekeeping and childcare activities in the neighboring towns of Cumbayá, Tumbaco¹⁵ and the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, where families could afford to pay a regular salary for such activities.

¹⁴ Like most of the countries in Latin America, Ecuador was severely affected by the so-called external-debt crisis, which led to the most far reaching structural reforms in the country being privatization of state owned industries and decentralization, among the most visible effects of the reforms. (see: Comunidad Andina 2001) On March 6, 1987, the Northeast part of Ecuador also suffered a grade VIII earthquake, which killed about 300 people and destroyed important components of the TransEcuadorian Pipeline, which at that time transported all the Ecuadorian oil for export. Ecuador lost oil income for several months, which increased the negative effect of the disasters (Resumen de efectos de los terremotos de Grado VIII, <http://www.igepn.edu.ec/sismologia/sismicidad/historica/efectos.htm>)

¹⁵ Like Pifo, Cumbayá and Tumbaco are rural parishes of Quito. But these two towns have become residential areas for prosperous families. Cumbayá and Tumbaco are 5 and 10 km. distant from Quito and 30 and 25 km. distant from Pifo respectively. Every day during working hours the transportation is frequent between the corridor Quito – Cumbaya – Tumbaco, and Pifo.

In the mid 1980's, in accordance with the new national and international economic logic to diversify areas where the country could compete in the international market, national and international investors bought land in rural areas to establish flower plantations. Generally these lands belonged to the *haciendas*, but often also buying small pieces of land from peasants who were previously engaged in subsistence agriculture.¹⁶ The high costs of agricultural supplies like seeds, and pesticides, forced some peasant families to sell their croplands and then to find other ways to get earnings for subsistence.

Objective and subjective factors worked together to convince local people that flower plantations, the new agricultural businesses installed in their area, were the best and most important employment source. Proximity, easy accessibility, regular wages, and stability that flower plantations provided were the main factors to get people involved in this new production system.

The appearance of new economic activities and the contact with urban areas due to improved roads and transportation have sharply changed the local socio-economic landscape of some rural areas like Mulauco. In this *Comuna*, people have shifted their focus from local traditional activities like communal and religious meetings, sports, and recreational events to more external issues like music programs or shopping. Participation in some Mulauco traditional activities like “*comite pro-mejoras*”, *mingas*, religious festivities, and others that were central to social life,¹⁷ have sharply declined.

¹⁶ One of the goals of agrarian reform process promoted by the Ecuadorian government since 1964, was the promotion of change in the agrarian markets. A side effect of this goal was that many big landlords were forced to sell all or part of their *haciendas*, which were further used for capital-intensive agriculture purposes. (See Barsky 1990: 25)

¹⁷ In research on flower plantation indigenous women workers, Korovkin (2002) also found that some traditional forms of social organization were declining. Of course that might not necessarily be related with flower activities, but with the wider socioeconomic changes that Ecuadorian rural areas are experiencing.

While previously women and men from Mulauco's society had been able to work together to sustain their families' livelihood, there is now evident an increasing tendency to exercise individual livelihood strategies. Families, whose members were willing to seek any income-generating activity, were more apt to diversify income sources, combining different strategies like waged work, family crops, and occasional work. In the previous social structure, families concentrated on working the family's cropland and on trading their products at the weekly fair. The main products grown were potatoes, corn, green beans, onions, and vegetables, which provided a basic diet for family consumption and some surplus production to sell in local market (Interview with a 71 year old flower worker's father).

The change in family survival strategy was a local response to the new economic context in which Ecuador got involved after the debt crisis in the early 1980s. This new economic environment was characterized by increasing trade liberalization, foreign investment, and privatization, promoted by neoliberalism, which has become the predominant paradigm in the Ecuadorian economy.

CHAPTER 2 INVISIBLE BUT INDISPENSABLE: WOMEN'S WORK AT HOME

Academic and political discussions on gender inequalities have devoted considerable amount of analysis to the link between women and work. Work has been depicted as one of the most important aspects in the unequal relations between women and men. The first aspect to consider in this topic is the ideological blindness of society toward women's unpaid work. As has been abundantly studied, women perform some of the heaviest social works, which is the group of basic activities that the whole economic system needs for social reproduction. This means that women are responsible for three forms of reproduction at the household level: biological reproduction (bearing children); daily reproduction (the maintenance of family members through domestic tasks for subsistence; and social reproduction (the extra productive tasks for maintaining the social system) (Jelin 1991). Because of all these home and social reproductive activities that are unpaid and unrecognized, men are able to work outside the home in paid work. Although women's work has an important social value, it has not been considered relevant for development by multilateral and development organizations. This is what social scientists have called invisible work (Otegui Pascual 1999).

The work of rural women in Latin America, and particularly in the Andean region, has been depicted in more or less the same terms of invisibility. But in these areas, women not only perform reproductive activities, but productive ones also. Along with the traditional home tasks, women in rural areas are responsible for substantial amounts of productive activities, particularly in agricultural matters for family consumption. And

although the work of rural women is also unpaid, unrecognized, and considered as irrelevant for development, these women are managing households and performing productive activities in the same way the men do.

The analysis of the traditional role of women at home and how it is socially considered is important to determine the changes that paid work produces in rural women. In this Chapter, I analyze the traditional social understanding of women's unpaid work at home, which has been depicted as unproductive and irrelevant for development. Since the economic system of waged work was designed only for men, there was a process of incorporation of women in capitalist activities as a way of seeking gender equality.

As a form of understanding the nature of the role of peasant women in the household in the social and geographic area in which this thesis is framed, I will review the role of women's work in the household in the Andean area. This review will be of great importance to determine the direct and indirect impact of the incorporation of women in waged work, which will be analyzed in Chapter 5.

Women and Work: Always Together but Not Always Recognized

One of the most interesting topics in gender studies is the discussion of women's transition from being household and unpaid workers to being paid workers in capitalist relations of production. In most of the world, culture has assigned household management to women and, as is generally agreed, their work has never been perceived as social labor or real work. Hence, it has been viewed as not relevant for development (Hardin 1998; Safilios 1998). Women in non-industrialized societies spend their lives at home and are generally responsible for survival tasks like child rearing, preparing food, and caring for crops and domestic animals (Boserup 1970). This situation is the basis for

the conventional ideology of women's images of "good wife" and "good mother, which are a part of popular culture and permeated official political decisions of both national and international development agencies (French and James 1997).

Women's activities at home deprived them of the opportunity to work for economically accumulation or productive purposes, but at the same time that work at home was not seen as something valuable and socially necessary. Since household work was outside of capitalist relations of production, women were considered "unoccupied" and "economically inactive" by the official understanding. Only when women leave home to work in paid activities does their work become "real" and as a result considered relevant for development (Charseworth & Wright 1991). Recognizing money as the only official measure of labor is a masculine biased concept, because most men do not work at home. But domestic work is in fact labor and it takes its toll on the people who do it. According to Nuño Gomez (1999) women spend between 9 to 10 hours per day in non-paid tasks that are completely essential for family reproduction.

Charseworth and Wright (1991) assert that women were seen as merely responsible for domestic tasks like caring for children, providing food and running the households or they were portrayed in an elaborate metaphor, as "the guardians of national culture, indigenous religion, and family traditions". The main consequence of this unconscious and prevailing reasoning is that, because of gender inequality and social exclusion, women were largely ignored by development plans. Moreover, literacy and job-training programs were designed for men only. Therefore the whole concept of modernization and development was biased to award men access to income generating work (Harding 1998). By "leaving women out" of paid work, national economies took advantage of

women's unpaid domestic labor, which allowed men to work effectively in paid jobs.

This fact is now being officially and politically recognized in some countries where policies on women reasoned that despite the lack of social recognition,

Women play important physical and symbolic roles at home where they are bringing up children while their husbands work, and socially, the invisible work of women is contributing to sustain the socio-economic environment of surrounding societies in such degree that the economy would collapse without women's unpaid labor (Advisory Council 2003).

Commenting on the Marxist economist Ernest Mandel, Benston (1969) clarifies that despite its import to social production, women's work at home is not seen as relevant for capitalist economy due to the fact that it does not have an exchange value, but only a use value. What is important in capitalist society is the production of exchange value commodities. Cooking soup, sewing a button on a garment, or caring for children "constitute production, but it is not production for market." (Benston 1969). Therefore, by ignoring women's work at home, the capitalist system takes advantage not only of a worker's surplus value, but of the free work of women also.

To amend the practice of ignoring women in national policies and to promote a better position for women at home, one of the aims of development projects in non-industrialized countries during the 1980's and 1990's, was the incorporation of women, especially from rural areas, into the labor force (IADB 1987). The main concern regarding this policy was on the effects that the proletarianization of women could have on their family and, of course, their personal well-being.

People are divided on this issue. For some, income from paid work helps women achieve personal realization and improve both self-esteem and decision-making capacity within the family where gender and family relations tend to get better (see USAID 1999). But other authors think that the involvement of women in capitalist work relations does

not have a clear positive effect on the improvement of gender or family relations, personal self-worth, or her decisional capacity within the family (Carr and Chen 2001).

Since women's earnings from paid work allowed them some degree of well-being and security, social researchers were convinced that women's access to independent income could promote the rise in their status and a decrease in female/male disparities (Safilios-Rothschild 1988 cited in Byron 1999). Marxist thinkers also thought that the situation of women would improve by granting them access to paid work. Lenin was aware that women are doubly oppressed: by the system and by men. To liberate women from both forms of oppression, he thought that it was necessary to allow women to work in conditions equal to those of men (Lenin cited by Zetkin 1971).

In the capitalist system, the involvement of women in paid work is often explained as a step on the path to full democratization in terms of declarative equality of rights (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1997), but some authors like Beneria and Sen (1977) point out that involving women in paid work was a process initiated to gain access to inexpensive labor. If that is true, the massive influx of women into capitalist work relations sustained after World War II in urban societies reveals only a case of the "effectiveness" of the capitalistic system in maximizing profits, and not an advance in work democratization.

Other scholars offer additional perspectives on the nature of women's incorporation into waged work. Díaz Muñoz, (1978 cited in Herrera 1999) explains that in rural areas women likely to become paid workers are principally those whose families lack land for agriculture. Under the assumption that women do not have alternatives, factories and other businesses hire them at low wages (White 2000). Herrera (1999) asserts that

another consideration in hiring women is the notion that women are docile and easy to supervise; Hancock (2001) concurs that businessmen assume that women are “more easily exploited, less likely to strike or form membership organizations, are comparatively free from family responsibilities, and more adept at doing repetitive and delicate tasks”.

But going beyond the unconscious prejudices that explain women’s experience with paid work, their involvement in capitalist relations of production was supposed to improve gender equality and family relations (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1997). This same reasoning continues to inform the policies of decision makers in non-industrialized countries that promote female job sources by expanding non-traditional economic activities in rural areas (Korovkin 2002).

In opposition to the idea that paid work will help women, some authors think that the incorporation of women into capitalist relations of production is instead promoting more inequality and lowering their economic position (Charseworth & Wright 1991). According to these authors, despite the obvious economic benefits, capitalist work has not led to better gender and family relations.

Slater (1999) considers that the participation of women in wage labor does not necessarily provide them greater control, power, or social representation. Their income goes directly to supplement the very low contributions of their spouses. Therefore, it is committed to subsistence needs. Criticizing the capitalist attitude toward women and accepting the limitations of opening jobs for women, Lenin was clear that by working as waged laborers only, women could not overcome the old right of husband over wife, which will persist (Lenin cited by Zetkin 1971).

Contrary to development theories, the incorporation of women into paid work does not necessarily guarantee their liberation nor increase their economic independence or social standing and has little impact on women's equality (Charseworth & Wright 1991). In non-industrialized countries, the increasing economic reactivation has brought greater employment opportunities for women, but they are found at the lowest paid and lowest status jobs without career paths (Charseworth & Wright 1991). Women carry the weight of gender inequality into the work place and the situation is reinforced in the new work position (Roldán, 1986, cited in Herrera 1999). In this sense, the potential for paid work to increase the inequality of women and lower their economic position is high.

In Latin American countries, and especially in rural areas, the deep economic crisis is pushing women to become involved in income-earning activities to meet the increasing cost of household survival (Pearson 2000). Contrary to the industrialized countries, where industry was the main source of jobs for rural people, in the Latin American industry plays a secondary role in providing jobs. Most of the work sources are provided by so-called non-traditional export agriculture, consisting of crops like flowers, fruits, and other agricultural products that sell easily in international markets.

In conclusion, the waged work in which women are increasingly being engaged is part of the expansion of the capitalist system and not necessarily related to a social process to achieve democratization nor to equalize gender relations. Therefore, the pattern of gender inequalities that has characterized human history, particularly in so-called western culture, is being reinforced despite the potential for positive social change inherent in the incorporation of women into the paid workforce.

Latin American Peasant Women: Household and Work

As all the cases of women's activities, rural and indigenous women work was traditionally invisible to western understanding. National governments, multilateral organizations, and development agencies have assumed that peasant women were not productive agents of the economic cycle. This assumption is true to the extent that women's work in general is not recognized either. As in other aspects, the role of peasant and indigenous women tends to be analyzed with the same lens used to view urban societies.¹

Rural families' production was traditionally more oriented to household survival than to surplus accumulation. The type of activities peasants do are in the realm of subsistence agriculture, which has supported rural culture for hundreds of years. As noted by Mandel (cited in Benston 1969), this subsistence economic system has been ignored by capitalist society or at least not taken as "real work" because it is not an exchange value activity. It is for self-consumption. In this way, subsistence agriculture and women's work at home share exactly the same situation in capitalist society: both play important social roles, but are deemed irrelevant by the official economy.

In a comprehensive understanding of rural socioeconomic reality, the family's production was an important economic support to national economies in the sense that such production maintained a whole social group, without significant state participation.

¹ Indeed, the subjugation of peasant and indigenous people in Latin America is broadly accepted. As discussed in Chapter 3, Hardman (1979) explains that these comments respond to distortions due to the theoretical frame used, which employs European patterns to conceptualize social situations involving women. Observers tend to utilize patterns values and prejudices from their own cultural background, and as a result, what women have preserved from their own culture has been obscured by a foreign framework for analysis or simply ignored (Hardman 1979). Jelin (1990) also critiques the "opposition between the domestic / females / powerless domain and the public / male / powerful as fundamentally cultural and ideological" which is commonly accepted for Latin America.

Without rural families' participation in self-subsistence agriculture, the reproduction of rural society would not be viable.

Women in rural areas have had direct access to the land as mean of production. As abundant literature suggests, rural women have traditionally had an active role in the household economy. They are effective household managers, with a wide degree of decisions making power over the tasks under their care. This role is stronger in indigenous populations where even after a long history of cultural distortions, women generally possess a clearly defined role in the household. Chapter 3 of this thesis shows how the active role of women in the household is part of cultural identity in several cases in the Andean world, including the Ecuadorian area.

Deere's (forthcoming) comments on a survey on the participation of rural women in subsistence agriculture in Ecuador confirm the importance of women in household agricultural activities. The results of the study show that 70% of rural women in the Andean area, and 20% on the coast, are involved in that kind of agriculture. Moreover, agriculture was the primary sector of activity for 72% of women in the sierra compared with only 47.5% on the coast.

In the more specific situation of indigenous families, although some of them were part of the obsolete *hacienda* system labor relations, in that context women were also important agents of household reproduction. Women's role in the *huasipungos*² were directly associated with the economic sustenance of the household, while their husbands were laborers on the *hacienda*'s land.

² As explained in Chapter 1, *huasipungos* were a small land parcel (about 1 – 2 acres) that indigenous people were assigned from big landowners (hacendados), as part of the wage labor in the haciendas. *Huasipungos* were used to grow agricultural products and domestic animals for indigenous family sustenance. The *huasipungo* system was part of indigenous household and was mainly carried out by women, while men were working in the hacienda's land.

Beyond agriculture, several studies have demonstrated the important role of women in natural resource management. Chiappe (1995:294) relates the link that rural women in Latin America have with forests, from which they obtain firewood, medicinal plants, and fodder for animals. Due to proximity to natural ecosystems in rural areas, women have learned to deal with natural resources and how to take advantage of them to fulfill family necessities. Chiappe also comments that due to the men's emigration to urban areas seeking jobs, women often take control of the entire household management, including home and agriculture tasks.

Analyzed in the abovementioned terms, the socio-economic role of peasant and indigenous women greatly differs from that passive role attributed to urban women. In contrast to rural women, urban women are economically isolated at home, where they work to allow the regular reproduction of the male labor force, which normally is performed outside the home. Therefore, non-working urban women have not had direct contact with the means of production, except through the husband.

The main conclusion of the analysis of the household role of Andean peasant women is that it has not been "invisibilized" by traditional societies. This role was recognized and respected in their community. This recognition is part of a strong cultural background, which is still pervasive in most of the rural areas of the Andean area.³

Although the important role of peasant women in the household is recognized, it is relevant to consider that the debt crisis of the 1980s, and subsequent economic failures, promoted a new economic paradigm in the region. The new economic paradigm was the reduction of the public sector and the expansion of private sector, which defined among

³ This cultural background and its impact in the gender relations will be analyzed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

other trends, the introduction of capital-intensive agriculture activities in rural realities. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, this was the key measure that provoked a substantial change in women's role in the household, and their involvement in waged work.

CHAPTER 3 FAMILY AND GENDER RELATIONS IN THE ANDEAN CONTEXT

Cultural and economic environments shape family and gender relations in all societies of the world. These two social elements are fundamental to determine the level of equity/inequity that exists within families and between genders. Since this study is based on a society that belongs to a particular cultural, social, and economic background, it is important to review the patterns that culturally shape the area where this study is based.

The people of Mulauco, the small rural neighborhood from which women flower workers provided the elements for this study, are rapidly adopting western urban forms of life. However, the Mulaquenses are still part of the indigenous population of Ecuador. This cultural belonging links these people with Andean culture, which is a prevalent ideological notion in Ecuador and neighboring countries.

As a form of establishing a cultural context to analyze the impacts of the involvement of women in waged work, on family and gender relations, in this chapter I will review these types of relations in the Andean world. With examples from different Andean countries, I will show how indigenous people's concepts of family and gender relations are strongly rooted in cultural and historical perceptions.

Family and Society in a Modern Context

Family has been defined as an intergenerational system based on blood kin relations, and marital relationships (Gimeno, 1999). As a hub of social learning, family systems entail several interrelations not only with other groups, but also among its

members. The family involves a structure, a hierarchy, and roles for every member, which is defined by their position in the structure. These family relations have been seen as something natural or defined by biological determinism (gender, age), but feminist thinkers view family as a “strong mechanism of class position and an efficient method of creating and transmitting gender inequalities.” (Barrety & Macintosh 1995).

In Ecuador, the basic family structure lies in a core relation: the mother-child, link, which is strengthened and reinforced as the child grows up. In addition, the family has a function of connecting its members to society, being a bridge between the individual and collective realms (Adelina Gimeno, 1999). Family plays a strong role not only in members’ self-perception, but also in the shaping of values, beliefs, and attitudes related to society, nature and environment, culture, work, and other elements of social life. However as I will describe later, in contemporary Latin America, particularly in Ecuador, the concept of the urban family is quite different than that of the rural and/or indigenous families of the Andean area. In urban areas, where the mainstream Andean society principally lives with mixed indigenous and European descent, the concept of family is rooted in Western and Christian traditions.

Although there is a long history of sharing culture and geography, the indigenous family is quite different from the mainstream Ecuadorian family. Traditionally, indigenous people’s culture, and socioeconomic life have differed greater from that of the urban society where European notions are prevalent.

Family and Gender Relations in the Andean World

Family and gender relations in the Andean world are a complex and debated issue; thus, explaining them is not a risk-free task. The mere geographical reference to the territory is problematic: although the Andean region comprises all or part of the territorial

areas of seven countries in South America (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina), culturally this region has been restricted to the area ruled by the Tahuantinsuyu Empire of the Inca more than five centuries ago. Currently, the area encompasses territories from northern Argentina to northern Ecuador.

Despite the fact that there are many differences based on particular historical, economic and geographical backgrounds, there are some aspects in which Andean peoples have a strong common cultural background. The main ones are that the local people speak Quichua,¹ tend to live in communities, and preserve cultural values based on Incan culture or other pre-Columbian societies associated with that empire.

Although it is imprecise to generalize about Andean gender relations, it is possible to detect some general patterns in rural Andean culture. Despite the immensity of its geographical area, which covers about one million square miles, some scholars have studied and articulated these patterns, which could be summarized in three broad types of gender relationships: equality, inequality and complementarity.

Equality in Gender Relations

Gender relations of equality are those in which women and men indistinctly share roles at home and do not pretend to exercise any kind of power over each other. This means the assumption by both women and men that they have same rights to determine all the issues that pertain to the family. To illustrate gender relations of equality I will cite the case of a rural Ecuadorian community named Chanchalo, a small village in the south of Quito.

¹ There are two dialects of the Quichua language. The Ecuadorian-Argentinean type, which is spoken in Ecuador, the south of Colombia, and the north of Argentina; and the Cuzco type, which is spoken in Peru and Bolivia. The name of the first one is written "Quichua," and the second, "Quechua" (Carpenter 1982). In local contexts there are also other type of this language. In Ecuador there are the highland and Amazonian Quichua types. In Peru there are the Northern and Southern Quechua types.

Analyzing work practices in this village, Hamilton (2001) noted that there are no differences between women and men. They both work hard in the agricultural activities that are the source of subsistence of this village. Without gender biases, women and men manage household resources, make decisions on both productive enterprises and reproductive activities, and participate in community development. This all seems to happen without regard to whether one is the wife or the husband, female or male (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2001)

After women and men work in the field, taking care of the family's animals and crops, they both prepare meals, put children to bed, wash clothes, and clean the house. Both engage in all types of work without a discernible division of labor. The decision-making process in the household for most issues, such as the children, crop mix and schedule, technology input, and household expenditures, is also described as consultative, consensual, and egalitarian. Who actually handles the household's cash flow in this household is also consistent with the pattern among households in this community: all income is pooled, and the wife manages the farm and household income, expenditures, and savings. The control of land, income streams, technology, and labor is gender-neutral, that is, both spouses have equal control over resources and participate in allocation decisions.

Variations that account for gender differences in studies of other communities and societies, such as age, wealth, status, and access to wage labor opportunities, seem to be irrelevant in Chanchalo. Hamilton demonstrates in detail, that young and old women in both wealthy and poor households, those with more or less education, with higher or lower status in the community, who have temporarily migrated, or who have never left

Chanchalo, behave as equals with their husbands and are treated as such, within and outside the household. As a result of this practice, men and women enter into marriage on an equal basis. When they are asked which spouse is the household head the universal response for both wife and husband is that their households have “*dos cabezas*” (two heads), not just one (Hamilton 2001).

According to Hamilton, Chanchalo has resisted the prevailing patriarchal culture of Ecuador and the rest of Latin America thanks to the absence of development projects in this village. Being ignored by development, Chanchalo was not influenced by the gendered ideology of the predominant culture of Ecuador.

Inequality in Gender Relations

Gender relations of inequality are those where one partner (generally the man), uses any form of power over the other part to determine the different issues pertaining to family like size, productive activities, expense allocations, etc. Doughty (1971 cited in Stein 1972), comments that within the family unity it is the husband who gives “orders” and is considered “more valuable” than his wife, whose ideal role is conceptualized as essentially passive in nature, “like the soil in which man plants his seeds so they are fed”. At meals, women and girls serve the men their food, and then eat elsewhere. Likewise, women walk behind their husbands to show their respect in public.

Here the rural Andean woman is depicted as humble, obedient, and completely controlled by men. Bourque and Warren (1981) who studied women in Moyobamba, Peru (about 100 km from Lima), and Stølen (1987) who studied gender relations in the community of Caipi, in Machachi, (about 50 km from Quito), confirm this pattern of inferiority in rural Andean women.

Bourque and Warren (1981: 114) observed in Moyobamba that women tend to be responsible for childcare and the household, and take part in agricultural activities, which are typically masculine. Although women's work in agriculture is notable, men minimize it and consider women's place to be in the house. This masculine perception creates an imbalance in women's access to the means of production, particularly to land, where women are less likely to receive a parcel. Women in this village are accepted as "comuneras"² only when they do not have a husband, father, or son. In this example, despite the economic help women provide to the family, they are in a position of inferiority.

In her study in Caipi, Stølen (1987) manifests that women do many tasks at home and in the predominant economic activity of agriculture. Plowing is the only task women do not perform, not because of any taboo, but simply because they lack the skill (some men cannot use the plow either). Women in Caipi can do any kind of work without affecting their femininity. However, men cannot perform certain tasks like washing the clothes or cleaning the house. Otherwise they could lose prestige.

The role of women in Caipi is that of mother and wife. The stereotype of the "true" women is of one that is a "... worker, shy, aloof, particularly with men outside the family, and faithful" (Stølen 1987: 92). Girls learn that they will be "conquered" by a man, but this will be allowed only if the man is an appropriate match and of a suitable age. Before that, young women must avoid masculine friendship.

The first years of marriage are particularly painful for the women of Caipi, because they suffer from the jealousy of their husbands, who mistreat them and usually are

² Member of the *Comuna*, the indigenous organization that manages land, production and other socioeconomic issues of the community.

involved in infidelity. The ideal of men is to have a son, which is part of masculine identity. If that does not happen, the relationship deteriorates (Stølen 1987: 83). Women always lose their friends after getting married, but men are allowed to maintain their circle of friends.

The differences between masculine and feminine are accepted as something natural, as coming from the biological differences created by God. From this “natural order, women accept their fate and teach their daughters to accept it as a reality. Women do not question the behavior of their husbands, nor attempt to change their sons (Stølen 1987: 160).

Complementary Gender Relations

Gender relations of complementarity are those where women and men divide their roles and respect each other. In this type of relation, which is probably the most extended in the Andean area, women and men make decisions without interference by spouses.

In the Andean cultures, gender relations are seen as the realm of sexual opposition and complement, which has been called the “Andean dualism” (Isbell 1977). This conceptualization of female-male relations was a way of keeping a natural harmony, as the “day/night forces that are different but complementary“(Alderete 1992). These relations were based on a horizontal structure, where reciprocity played an important role not only within the family, but in the community as well (Isbell 1973). This perception of gender relations was the opposite of the western conception, where everything was necessarily singularized and hierarchized (Condori 1986).

Cases of complementary gender relations are not scarce in the Andean region, as evidenced by examples from Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The first example is the Salasaca community in highland central Ecuador, in the province of Tungurahua, where

women are influential members of the society (Poeschel 1988). As in other Andean communities, they are responsible for managing the household economy and deciding how the income will be spent. Despite the fact that women perform an important role in agriculture, which contributes to household income, they do not have an equivalent public participation. Local authorities, for example are always men. This is interpreted as a point of gender equilibrium, so that the economic power of women at home is counterbalanced with the political power of men outside the home. Poeschel (1988: 134) notes that Salasaca women enjoy a remarkable social prestige and effective power because of the following factors:

- Women's economic contribution to the household through their work at home
- Their role as spouse and mother, which is highly valued;
- The socializing environment and the strong and long-lasting ties with children that women foster
- Social practices, like solidarity, reciprocity, and access to the means of production, and inheritance, etc.

Salasaca women are also a kind of cultural refuge for men, who tend to go outside the community to work. Once in the Ecuadorian mainstream society, they feel insecure because of language and cultural barriers. Women, on the other hand do not like to go outside and are less likely to speak Spanish. As a result, males rely on women to preserve the culture. They value women's role in cultural resistance and integration.

In contrast with the Salasaca women who do not like to leave their community, the Quichua women from Pastaza, in the Ecuadorian Amazon area, are generally chosen by their community to represent them in outside events. For example, women of this area have played an important role in the protest that for several years this community has pursued against the Ecuadorian government in order to prevent oil companies' activity in

their territory. Due to their social prestige, Quichua women perform most of the political activities aimed at convincing local authorities to ban oil exploration and exploitation in the Quichua territory. They are usually selected to denounce the oil development invasion in their lands to international organizations. An illustration of this fact was the visit to the University of Florida by a Quichua woman several months ago. She brought attention to the social and environmental impacts caused by oil exploitation in the indigenous territory³ to the campus.

Peru offers another example of gender complementary relations in the highlands of the Andes. Describing the subsistence economy of the indigenous community of Huaro near Cuzco in southern Perú, Núñez del Prado Bejar (1975) explains that there is a clear work division among women and men. Men are responsible for agricultural production on the family parcel while women are in charge of managing the crop and distributing the harvest. Women are in charge of storing and selling the production, and managing the money. It is socially accepted that women are skilled and honest financial managers. Núñez del Prado Bejar relates an anecdote in a communal meeting where a man was proposed as the community treasurer. The proposal caused hilarity among the people since it was understood that only women could handle such responsibility correctly. Men from Huaro cannot take part in any realm reserved for women; otherwise they will be ridiculed and nicknamed “guarmichu” o “guarmishina” (like a women).

The decision making process is another example of complementarity in Huaro. Women’s participation in communitarian meetings is only as mere observers. However, even though women do not express opinions publicly, they promote family decisions at

³ Cristina Gualinga, member of the Quichua people of Sarayacu, visited the University of Florida’s Center for Latin American Studies on September 20, 2003.

home. Then men express these decisions in the communal meetings. There are cases in which a man has had to publicly retract an opinion if it was not uttered as was agreed at home between woman and man. This cultural manifestation, which is also common in rural areas in Ecuador, could confuse experienced researchers that might see only docile women attending these meetings.

A final example of gender complementarity relations is from the Laymi of Bolivia, studied by Olivia Harris (1978, 1980). Harris explains that for Laymi people marriage is a way for getting cultural completeness. It is the fruitful cooperation of man and woman that produces culture, in contrast to unmarried people who are not considered cultural entities. Culture is based on duality, in contrast to someone what has remained single when s/he should have been paired (Harris 1978: 28).

Marriage is considered not simply as a means for women to achieve cultural completeness, but also as a way to domesticate sexuality, which does not have any kind of taboo.⁴ Before marriage youngsters have sexual relations outdoors (savage) but after marriage only within the communities (cultured).

Among Laymi, gender complementation is not only a human but also a divine need. Their gods need life partners as well: besides the Inti, the God Sun that protects the moral order, there is the Moon, which is feminine. Pachamama, the mother Earth, the symbol of inhabited and cultivated land, is the partner of the *kumpriras*, the savage mountain. In Laymi rituals female-male unity is related to the use of both hands: left for women and right for men. Highlands are considered masculine and valleys are feminine.

⁴ This differs from notions of Latin American urban areas. Dussel (1975 cited in Poeschel 1988) explains that the Latin-American male, descendant of Visigoths, Christians, and conquerors, sees erotic relations as a conquest and seeks a position of dominance. As a result, as described by feminists, in the Latin American concept of family the woman is assumed to be an object, and conjugal sexuality is basically masculine and dominating, which produces a family structure that tends to be oppressive to women.

As discussed later, this dualism is part of Quichua linguistic postulates and thus present in most Quichua speakers (Hardman 1985; Carpenter 1982).

The examples of complementarity in gender relations show that there is a trend in Andean traditional culture to practice gender relations in a horizontal social, economic, and political perspective. There is a consistent tendency to assign women and men different but complementary family and social responsibilities. The most important feature from Andean gender relations is that no matter what kind of work either men or women do, it is valued, counted and has a special place and recognition the family and community, which confirms an equilibrium in gender relations.⁵

Gender Relations and Cultural Traditions

Equity and complementarity seem to be the predominant trend in gender relations in the traditional people of the Andean area. An explanation of this trend could be the shared culture of Andean people based on their linguistic roots. Quichua and Aymara, the main languages these people speak or are familiar with, have in common some linguistic postulates that explain the culture. Hardman (cited by Carpenter 1982: 100) states that linguistic postulates are “those recurrent categorizations in the language which are most directly and most tightly tied to the perceptions of the speakers, those elements which, while language is imposed, are so well imposed that speakers consider them just naturally part of the universe...” Among the postulates of Quichua and Aymara are bipartition, duality, and humanness.

⁵ The gender equilibrium of non-western societies was also perceived in indigenous peoples in North America, particularly the USA. According to Lucrecia Mott, pioneer in the feminist movement, the subordination of women to men in the USA was promoted by the legal and religious perspectives that practically turned wives into their husbands’ slaves. But indigenous societies in this country did not experience such discrimination against women (Wagner 2001). Wagner (2001) affirms that the Haudenosaunee women (Iroquoians) enjoyed balanced gender environment, without domestic violence or male oppression. For that reason, the first women’s rights activists in the USA were inspired by Iroquoian society.

The linguistic postulate of duality, present in Quichua and Aymara, is a representation of how the societies that speak such languages acknowledge/construct life as something that needs to be complemented. Harris (1978 cited in Dean 2001) discusses the notion of *chachawarmi* among the contemporary Aymara-speaking Laymi of Bolivia. *Chacha* means “man” or “husband,” while *warmi* means “woman” or “wife,” and she explains that this term operates to identify the pair bond as a single, distinct unit. (Dean 2001: 176). Other expressions of dualism in Andean societies are in the distribution of power between women and men, where social power corresponds to men and the economic power to woman. Dualism is an important principle in the Andes, reflected in society, geography, and gender relations. In all the representations of Andean culture the concept of dualism is omnipresent and is manifested in the concepts of *yanantin* and *yanapaque*, which refers to mirror imagery and symmetry. These applied to gender relations represent an ideal complementary and equality in the couple⁶.

Another consequence of the linguistic postulates is the lack of gender related articles in Quichua. There is no difference between masculine and feminine, which is common in Indo-European languages. This linguistic feature is an indication of how a society establishes differences based on gender. In all the Indo-European languages, for example, it is linguistically correct to use the masculine to refer to both masculine and feminine genders, but the opposite is not possible.

Although the cultural worldview of indigenous communities that allows equity and complementarity in gender relations is strongly connected to cultural roots, it is subject to distortions or even disappearance. This could occur especially due to the imposition of

⁶ To review the linguistic postulates in Andean languages see: Carpenter (1982), and Hardman (1985).

alien values by the dominant culture of Andean countries. As Hamilton (2001) explained in the case of Chanchalo, this community was protected from unequal gender relation values because of the lack of developmental projects in its area.

According Silvia Arrom (cited in Deere and León 2002), the concept of the legal inferiority of women in Latin America was implemented during colonial times, and combined restriction and protection (Deere and León 2002). Until only a few decades ago, legal codes kept married women in a state of powerlessness, the same status assigned to minors and the insane. The system of gender relations prescribed the seclusion of women in the private sphere while men were assigned to the public, which was a kind of work division: women were assigned to the household work, and males to outside work. The first is characterized as being unpaid, invisible, and underestimated while the latter is paid, visible and socially valued (Nuño Gómez 1999). But the acculturation process is most visible in urban societies.

According to these views, it could be said that unequal gender relations are part of a process of acculturation of traditional and indigenous communities through contact with colonization by western society and more specifically through their contact with capitalist relations of production (Babb 1980). Deere and León (2002) confirm these ideas, commenting that Andean gender relations were traditionally immersed in a dynamic of complementarity. But these relations went through a transformation affected by the expression of hierarchy, based on Christian principles.

Alderete (1992) asserts that women in the indigenous movement are aware of the ideological distortions that colonization has caused. And they consider it necessary to recover traditional culture in order to restore the power that women enjoyed in traditional

societies. Although multiple cases of inequality in gender relations have been reported in Andean areas, Hardman (1979) explains that in some cases there is a distortion in the analysis due to the theoretical frame used, which employs European patterns to conceptualize social situations. Observers tend to utilize patterns, values, and prejudices from their own cultural background societies, and as a result, what Andean women have preserved from their own culture has been obscured by a foreign framework of analysis or simply ignored (Hardman 1979).

Gender Relations in Mulauco: An Overview

Mulauco is an indigenous community, but the local culture is not entirely traditional. During the field research carried out in this *Comuna*, I found what I could call both equal and unequal gender relations. Although Mulauco's way of life has been greatly affected by the proximity of urban areas, including Quito, which is about a one hour and a half bus trip, it still shows strong accents of the indigenous background of its population. Due to economic transformations in Ecuador, Mulauco's society has been slowly absorbed into the mainstream society of this country in the last decade. The fact that now practically all the families depend on earnings that come from outside the community, explains how integrated this community is with the national society. This reality also explains some mixed cultural features regarding gender relations in which is possible to observe traces of traditional indigenous dualism / complementarity, and an urban type of unequal gender relations.

As explained in Chapter 5, when Mulauco's economy was based on subsistence agriculture, women and men equally controlled the household. Both women and men were in the same decision-making level regarding the household's wealth and work responsibilities though there was a specialization on some tasks. In an interview

conducted with a 76 year old woman, she relates that she was responsible for childcare, food preparation, cleaning house, washing dishes, laundry, and other house chores. In addition, she fed small animals, and took care of the family agriculture plot. Her husband was responsible for activities like watering, plowing, cutting firewood, making fences, caring for cattle, and house building and repairs.⁷ These strength-required tasks were physically carried on outside the house, which could denote the traditional separation of the private and public, the female / male realms.

Men also were in charge of allocating the family's agricultural production surplus, which was traded in Pifo's weekly market, or sometimes bartered with neighboring peasants for other agricultural products or even for work. Men controlled household money but under the understanding that such money belonged to both wife and husband, because women also worked to grow agricultural products. Here the elderly woman explained that since the money belonged to both, the decision to spend it was taken also by both, women and men.⁸

Once the subsistence economy was overridden, women lost control over the household economy. Since men started to become involved in paid work, they began to control income, and allocate it for family needs according to their criteria. The 76-year-old women remembered that when the harvest was not enough to cover family's needs, her husband had to find a paid job on the nearest hacienda. She could not control his earnings because she did not participate in making the money.

⁷ Among the indigenous people's traditions is the building of the family's house according to traditional designs.

⁸ This perception of sharing power over money or the economy at the household level by women and men is maintained today by most of married women flower workers who said to me that they put together their own earnings with the husbands' earnings and decided what to do with that money.

When the Mulauco's men were more involved in paid work, husbands used to give women an amount of money every week for shopping for food. Although the expenditures with this amount were the exclusive decision of women, this was so tied to the household's needs that women in practice did not have any chance to make real decisions over expenses. The continued devaluation of the Ecuadorian currency over the last two decades, made the rural household acquisition power shrinks quickly. Women had to manage to combine some household raised food products (mainly potatoes, carrots, corn, and garden beans) with market obtained products (sugar, salt, rice, noodles, bread, soap, oil etc.).

The loss of economic control over the household due to the decline and disappearance of the subsistence economy is one of the aspects of gender relations that women most lamented in Mulauco. All the women interviewed explained that the goal of "having some money in hand" is very important for them, because with money one could manage many situations, especially those related to health and food necessities,⁹ without waiting for their husbands' arrival home.

With the involvement of women in paid work, they manage their own money as men do with their earnings. But in some cases it is customary to join the incomes of the women and the men. They then decide what to do with the money. In other cases, there are explicit agreements for deciding about certain kinds of expenses for women (especially food, medicines, school supplies, etc.), and others for men (tools, home improvement materials, utility bills, etc.). But expenses of great value are agreed upon by both women, and men, especially for furniture, some appliances like stereos, TVs, and

⁹ Particularly painful for women is recalling situations when they had to control a high fever or even bone fractures of their children at home because they did not have any cash to take a taxi or to buy medicines.

so on. In both cases it is possible to see an idea of sharing economic decision making between women and men. This aspect of equality in gender relations reflects the indigenous background of this community.

Another aspect of equal gender relations of equality in Mulauco is in decisions for activities of long lasting consequence. For example, when building the family house or improving/repairing it, men who are generally masons, work according the women's suggestions regarding the arrangement of rooms, kitchen, windows, doors, etc.

Under the inheritance system, women and men are considered equally. They do not make any distinctions among children, but in some cases women are more favored for land inheritance.¹⁰ This happens when a daughter is a single mother and the parents consider that she could be socially and/or economically weak.¹¹ In this case, despite the fact that parents could be upset because their daughter has a child without a stable or legal relation with a man, they usually give a better portion of land to her. This is a way to compensate the defenseless situation that the lack of a husband could imply for women.

Agricultural activities are still general in Mulauco where most of the families have crops for family consumption. Raising a few animals like cows, goats, chicken, and rabbits, is also frequent. In these activities, women and men take part equally, though men are in charge of the most strenuous activities.

Childcare, health, education, feeding, and recreation have been and are women's responsibility. Men could help in these tasks, but always upon women's request.

¹⁰ In this case it is important to consider that gender equality in inheritance is part of the Ecuadorian legal system, so it cannot be assessed as an exclusive cultural feature of indigenous people and peasants. See Ecuadorian Civil Code.

¹¹ Of course, the wife's argument is decisive to decide a better part for a daughter.

Women sometimes manage these responsibilities, exercising different tasks at once. For example, it is typical that children do school homework on a kitchen table, so the mother could control and guide them while she is cooking. Even when women have some free time, they try to combine it with home tasks. For example while watching TV, women iron or arrange clothes. The workload increases when women work outside the home. When women work, they spend the same 44 hours per week as men. But after paid work, women have to keep working at home for about 4 hours everyday in their regular responsibilities.

Considering free time and recreational activities reveals a huge difference between men and women. Activities like sports and chatting with friends seem to be a male privilege. They spend several hours every weekend playing soccer or *ecuavolley*.¹² This activity is scheduled generally on Sunday afternoon. Men also have the “right” to have a weekly beer drinking party with their workmates. It is common that after finishing work on Fridays, men go with friends to a tavern to drink beer or “*aguardiente*.”¹³ Those meetings usually last until midnight. In some cases when they get home they accuse or fight with their wives over real or imagined conflicts, and occasionally physical violence ensues. At the same time, women do not have an equivalent “right” to meet and enjoy time with their friends. This aspect I interpret as an effect of the division of the household’s economy, and the men’s understanding is that since they “alone” earn the money in their work outside home, they should have some privileges. The number of tasks assigned to women at home, and the male advantage of the use of free time are a particular aspects of gender inequality in Mulauco. Sometimes men decide to perform a

¹² It is a variant of volleyball, played by three players in each team. This sport is very popular in Ecuadorian rural areas and poor urban areas.

¹³ Alcoholic drink made of sugar cane.

house project like house repairing or improving, carpentry and so on. Those projects are done on weekends, and although they take most of the day, do not equal women's daily effort in home tasks.

A related situation about the use of time reveals that men can decide the use of their free time in "recreational activities" but women cannot, because they have so many responsibilities that it is physically impossible for them to have free time. In addition, some men get mad if their wives ask them to collaborate in house chores instead of going to play soccer or *ecuavolley*.

Contrasting women's disadvantaged situation at home that has sharply increased since the disruption of the subsistence economy, they are better positioned in the social sphere. Women are decisive in social events like *mingas*, comuna festivities, school meetings, and other public gatherings. Moreover, women can hold leading positions at the Comuna. The current president of the *Parents Committee of Mulauco's School*, is a woman,¹⁴ and the Vice-president of the *Comuna Mulauco*¹⁵ for the period 2002 – 2004, is also a woman. As shown before in this chapter, this is a traditional role of women in Andean rural communities.

Traditionally, women and men participated together in family and communal celebrations. Generally women are responsible for the preparation of food, which usually take several hours. Men are responsible for arranging decorations and beverages. Sometimes men arrange the traditional "palo de naranja"¹⁶ (orange stake), for the enjoyment of the children.

¹⁴ Doña Ines Haro, Presidenta del Comité de Padres de Familia de la Escuela Mulauco.

¹⁵ Doña Cristina Yanacolla, Vicepresidenta de la Comuna Mulauco period 2002 – 2004.

¹⁶ A standing pole with gifts organized on the top. To get the gifts children must climb the pole, which is usually oily to make difficult get the gifts.

This description of female / male gender relations reveals the socioeconomic changes that Mulauco underwent in the last two decades. From complementary gender relations while there was a subsistence economy, there has been a change toward a mixture of equity and inequity in gender relations. The explanation as to why people of Mulauco now mix aspects of equity and inequity in gender relations might be found in the increasing assimilation into urban realities and the national economy.

CHAPTER 4 GLOBALIZATION AND NTAES: THE CASE OF THE FLOWER INDUSTRY IN ECUADOR

As explained in Chapter 2, peasant women traditionally have had a major role in subsistence agriculture in Ecuador and other countries, which was severely affected by the change of economic paradigms that occurred over the last two decades. While subsistence agriculture was fading during the early 80s, another economic activity was emerging, favored by the same conditions that determined the disruption of domestic agriculture.

In this chapter I will explain the economic and political conditions that provoked the emergence of the NTAEs, which has produced changes in women's activities and in households. Stressing the analysis in Ecuador, I will describe the measures framed in the globalization and neoliberal processes that have promoted the emergence of flower agribusiness, the main NTAEs in Ecuador. I will also describe the potential threats that could determine the decline of this industry as a leading source of national earnings. Finally I will discuss the link between women and flower agribusiness, which is part of the international trend of the gender oriented workforce of NTAEs.

The importance of the analysis about the loss of the peasant subsistence economy, the emergence of NTAEs, and women's involvement in this new trend in agrarian production is to show how peasant women are deprived of one of their realms of household roles.

Economic Crisis and the Emergence of the Non-Traditional Agricultural Exports, (NTAEs)

Globalization, which could be defined as “the rapid and massive movement of capital, goods, people, ideas, institutions and images across the globe” (Fakir 2001), and neo-liberalism have close ties in the sense that both economic processes are congruent in their goals of free markets without government "interference", freedom of trade in goods and services, freer circulation of capital, and freer ability to invest (Robbins 1999). These two processes are reshaping Latin America’s economies.

The failure of the import substitution paradigm and the debt crisis that has affected the Latin American countries since the 1980’s were two of the main factors that provoked an array of economic measures taken by these countries. In addition, politically the world was experiencing a big change during these years. From the Keynesian ideas of active government participation in the market economy, which were commonly followed by most of the governments in the non-communist system, there was a shift to the neo-liberalism that has dominated thinking since the 1980’s.

The most important proponent of neoliberalism, and also the controller of the debt process, was the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF imposed certain conditions on indebted countries. To keep a status of loan eligibility, these countries have had to follow the so-called “structural adjustments” measures. These measures were basically the following: unilateral opening to foreign trade, extensive privatization of state enterprises, deregulation of goods, services, and labor markets, liberalization of capital markets, reduction of public outlays, downscaling state-supported social programs, and the end of “industrial policy” and any other form of state capitalism (Portes 1997: 358, Deere and Leon, 2002: 6).

The main objective of the neo-liberal prescriptions was to achieve free trade in all the countries of Latin America.¹ Latin America should open up their trade limitations to allow more imports in, and export more of their commodities such as raw materials, and labor-intensive products. Trying to reverse the economic crisis, governments encouraged foreign investment in an effort to help make the region's economies more efficient and globally competitive (Purcell 1999). As a result the Latin American countries tended to orient their economies toward businesses in which they could use their comparative advantages, such as activities related to the use of renewable natural resources, which were strongly promoted (CEPAL 2002). An additional aspect of the policies designed to reverse economic problems generated by the crisis, was the encouragement of foreign investment (Purcell 1999). Through foreign investments, governments tried to make the region's economies more efficient and globally competitive.

Instead of improving the industrialization process in which most of the countries were embarked until the 80s, the rationale of the process was to provoke the modernization of the economic areas that are needed for international trade, such as manufacture, agriculture, and other labor-intensive activities. Among the economic developments that fulfilled both the conditions of the "structural adjustments" promoted by IMF, and the socio-economic conditions of the region, were capital-intensive agricultural activities, known as "non-traditional agricultural exports", NTAEs (Thrupp et al, 1995). These activities, which were backed by World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development, fit very well with both IMF impositions, and local socio-economic conditions. NTAEs allowed the flow of foreign investments, and concurred

¹ But the process of neoliberalism is not restricted to Latin America; it is also sought for the rest of the countries of the world.

with the Latin American governments' interest in shifting national economies toward businesses in which they could use their comparative advantages: abundant natural resources and manual labor, low wages, and low operational costs (CEPAL 2002).

As a result of trade liberalization, which is the main purpose of structural adjustments, traditional agriculture was severely affected. Traditional agriculture, the activity in which peasants were mostly involved in Latin America before the 80s, was exposed to global markets by an intensified export thrust and an inundation of imports from countries that often provide generous agricultural subsidies to farming sectors. This trend provoked an asymmetrical competition among agriculture goods produced by non-developed and developed countries, the latter being benefited by the exchange. Due to subsidies still applied in many cases, processed and non-processed agriculture products from rich countries were less expensive than those from poor countries. In addition, the costs of transport, seeds, pesticides, nutrients, and other imported products used in agriculture by peasants were increased due to devaluation of national currencies and new terms of international trade. The consequence of this situation is that peasants of poor countries could not pay these costs, and thus, they were displaced from their habitual agriculture activities. This tendency explains why peasants have had to move from subsistence agriculture to waged work, usually in industrial agricultural plantations, and even to sell their lands for these activities.

Another purpose of trade liberalization was the deregulation / liberalization of labor and capital markets. To allow the flow of capital as foreign investment, countries were prompted to reduce or even eliminate some labor benefits traditionally scheduled for workers such as work security, fixed wages and work time, etc. Controlling these factors,

international capital could move from country to country in search of the lowest wage rates, and minimal labor benefits. This circumstance of trade liberalization was a direct negative impact of globalization on workers, who were subjected to disadvantageous working conditions (Carr and Chen 2001).

As a result, the direct effect of the structural adjustments was a change in the Latin American industry. Capital goods, technology, design, and other manufactured goods lost importance, and the production of commodities (especially by maquiladora industries), and the processing of natural resources gained importance (Katz 2000). Despite the fact that authors like Sunkel (2001) think that in the era of globalization “the primary sectors - agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining-are losing importance, while the secondary sectors - industry- and the tertiary sectors – services- expand more than proportionally and become increasingly important”, in Latin America a “*re-primarization*” of the economy is happening (Lysiak 2002). This means that natural resources are still playing an important role in the economy of these countries. The premise of the new trend for Latin America is to use its comparative advantages: natural resources and a low-cost and abundant labor force. A study done by CEPAL in nine Latin American Countries, including Mexico, Brazil and Chile, the main economies of the region, concluded that the volume of primary products exported between 1985 and 1995 tripled, and except for Mexico, all these countries were shifting to an intensive specialization on natural resource exploitation. (Schaper 1999)

Chile, one of the most successful countries in Latin America in applying the neo-liberal agenda and competing in the global economy, exemplifies the conversion of the region’s economy. “Two decades of trade liberalization and economic reform have

helped fuel Chile's enviable growth rate and contributed to lower inflation. The Chilean economy has grown by 6% a year since 1990. However, the World Trade Organization notes that despite diversification Chile's trade balance remains heavily dependent on copper exports. Primary goods, including copper, fruit, wine, forest and fish products, represent 85% of exports. Only about 10% of Chile's exports are manufactured, mainly from natural resources. In addition, a dualism has appeared in Chilean agriculture between the efficient fruit and forestry export sectors and less competitive domestic production" (Rojas 2002).

Because of this new trend toward economic specialization an increasing number of natural resource related projects are appearing or resuming in the region. Among these projects are: flower agribusinesses, palm oil monoculture and the mining industry in Ecuador, flower agribusiness in Colombia, timber extraction and conversion of natural forests in Bolivia and Chile, among others. In all these cases, the imperative is to extract greater quantities of natural resources such as water, food, wood, minerals, and energy from increasingly larger areas and wider territories, both national and international. (Sunkel 2001). Through these agriculture projects that seek to intensify the national export thrust, countries have tried to gain a place in the global markets.

By returning to the primary sector, some national economies are covering trade niches that allow them important earnings. Flowers, shrimp, palm oil, fruits, and other non-traditional primary products are among the first source of national earnings in most of the Latin American countries. The new policies lead to new economic activities based on the intensive use of natural resources, which are known as non-traditional agricultural exports, NTAEs (Katz 2000).

These activities, spawned in the last two decades, took advantage of low land prices in economically depressed areas, abundant and cheaper non-qualified labor, and sometimes, governmental benefits aimed at reactivating national economies.

Given that the benefits established to attract foreign investment meant a decrease of worker's salaries, it also implied/provoked/made necessary a change in labor force reproduction, which shifted from the state to the household, and within the households from men to women (Deere and Leon, 2002:5). Since the new economic paradigm that structural adjustment promoted looked for cost optimization in all production steps, it was necessary to incorporate non-qualified labor to do some tedious and time consuming tasks needed in the NTAEs. Women became the first choice for these activities.

Flower Agribusiness: The Most Successful NTAE in Ecuador

As discussed before, the economic trend promoted by neoliberal policies favored the development of productive activities related to products easily marketable at international markets, and based in agriculture modernization, which is known as NTAEs. Flower agribusiness is one of the more successful examples of non-traditional agricultural exports. Initiated in the late 1970's, it has become one of the most important export activities of the Andean countries, due to favorable climatic conditions and long sunlight exposure. In contrast to the poor results of most of the traditional economic activities in these countries, flower agribusiness has emerged as a leading source of national earnings and as an important source of employment.

In Ecuador, flower agribusinesses are principally located in the Andean region where flower plantations found inexpensive land and abundant non-qualified labor (Herrera 1999). The Andean rural areas have a traditional economy with very few cash generating activities, and flower agribusiness represented the most accessible and

attractive economic alternative available locally, especially for women (Table 1). Before the flower plantations arrived to the Andean region, the people in this area worked in subsistence agriculture and had weak economic exchanges with the national society (Herrera 1999).

Flower agribusiness ranks as the third most important non-traditional export product in Ecuador (Palan and Palan 1999). Between 1990 and 1993, this NTAE grew by 154% (Noel 1998:22), and the country now ranks as the fourth world exporter of flowers, after the Netherlands, Colombia, and Kenya. In 2003, flower exports of Ecuador were worth US\$ 309 millions (see Table 1)

Table 1. Flowers at a glance in Ecuador

Years	Workers		Area (acres)	Exports (US \$)
	Females	Males		
1997	15,230	10,153	N/A	N/A
1998	21,248	14,168	6,666	160,951,000
1999	21,469	14,313	6,923	179,857,000
2000	21,698	14,466	7,350	193,848,000
2001	21,915	14,610	7,923	233,038,000
2002	21,915	14,610	8,054	289,343,000
2003	N/A	N/A	8,538	309,597,000

Source: Expoflores 2003, Regiones de Mayor Crecimiento.

In addition to the environmental and social benefits that Ecuador provides for flower agribusiness—great sun exposure and low work wages—there are also some economic benefits resulting from measures of international and national policies that helped the blooming of NTAEs. The most important of these measures is the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) enacted by the US government and aimed to provide duty-free treatment for all products imported from Andean countries, except for textiles, footwear, petroleum and petroleum products, certain leather products, watches and watch parts, canned tuna, rum, sugar, syrups and molasses. Flowers and other NTAEs, were

among the products that obtained the benefit of free access to the US market. Signed into law on December 4, 1991, the ATPA (19 U.S.C. 3201) provided tariff benefits to Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia and was scheduled to expire on December 4, 2001.² This decision has enabled Ecuador's flower trade to take off in the world market (Holt 2000), and has enabled the Ecuadorian flower industry to allocate about 70% of its production to the US market (Mena Pozo 1999).

The easy commercialization of flowers in the US market as a consequence of the ATPA, allows this industry a short time of investment return. Mena Pozo (1999) states that investors are encouraged to invest in flowers due to the average of 3 years in which they could get back all their investments.³ Favorable measures for NTAEs were arranged in the Ecuadorian realm also. Among these measures is the so-called “*tercerización*,” which was a regulation that allowed NTAEs to temporarily contract workers on their plantations, without offering social security and other standard benefits scheduled for workers in Ecuador. This policy permitted greater control over salaries by flower agribusiness, which was important to keep competitive prices of the product in international markets.

A final advantage for NTAEs in Ecuador, particularly the flower agribusiness, was the favorable conversion between the currency used to pay services and the one obtained from trading the product. At the time of the rise of flower agribusiness, during the 1980s and 1990s, the exchange rate fluctuated from 60 sucres⁴ in 1984 to 25,000 sucres in 2000.

² The renewal of the ATPA with regard to flowers was resolved in 2002. This decision will need to be made again in 2005 (Anderson 2003).

³ Korovkin (2002) says “in 1983 the initial investment per one hectare of roses in Ecuador was \$300,000 as compared to \$1,300,000 in the US and the Netherlands, and \$600,000 in Israel (Korovkin 2002: 5).

⁴ Sucre was the currency of Ecuador since its republican inception in 1830 until 2000 when this country officially adopted the US dollar as national currency.

This unbalanced conversion was extremely favorable to flower agribusiness men who paid worker salaries, utilities, and other services in inexpensive sucres, but obtained high valued dollars from exporting their product. But this advantage was turned into a disadvantage when Ecuador decided to use dollars in national business contexts.

The advantages that flower agribusiness enjoyed fueled a great development of this industry in Ecuador, which is now one of the four major world flower producers. But despite the economic boom of flower agribusiness, it is a very sensitive industry and has to face some drawbacks that could threaten its entire economic structure.

The most critical threat that the flower industry must face is the end of the trade preferences under the ATPA, which could produce a contraction of the US market for the Ecuadorian roses that comprise 70% of total production. In the round of negotiations toward the free trade agreement that Ecuador has been discussing with the United States during 2004, some flower agribusinesses have raised concerns regarding the economic sustainability of the flower industry. The main issue that could constrain flower production is the expiration of the duty-free status in the United States on products imported from Ecuador and other Andean countries, which was scheduled for December 2001, but delayed due to a renewal approved in 2002. This renewal will last until 2005.⁵ If the duty-free status expires, it could result in disadvantageous trade conditions, not only for flowers but also for a whole range of commodities exported by Ecuador to the United States, including bananas, oil, minerals, and coffee. These concerns arose during the fourth round of negotiations toward the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and the Andean countries held in Puerto Rico during the second week of

⁵ The consensus to obtain a renewal of the ATPA in the US Congress was hard to reach due to debates on the damages caused by no tariff in local flower industry.

September 2004. A possible imposition of taxes for flower imports could signify the loss or severe contraction of the US market by the Ecuadorian flower industry. Requests from US flower producers to protect national production are also likely to determine an end to tariffs benefits that favor flowers from Andean countries.⁶

Another problem that the Ecuadorian flower industry has to face is the use of pesticides. Pesticides are used to maintain the aesthetic quality of the flowers. This use is an increasing economic burden for flower producers who have to pay high import costs for the pesticides they use (HOY 2004). But on the other hand, concerns have also appeared due to the high levels of pesticide residue on the petals of roses, which according to the US Environmental Working Group is fifty times greater than that allowed on food imports. Ecuadorian rose producers use on average 6 fungicides, 4 insecticides, 3 nematicides, and several herbicides (Holt 2000). Moreover, an Ecuadorian environmental group has accused flower industry of using banned pesticides (Alerta Verde 2000). If concerns about misuse of pesticides in Ecuadorian flowers increase, this industry could face an embargo in the US and other main markets.⁷

Another problem that threatens the flower industry is the high cost of transport of flowers from Ecuador to the international markets. According to flower agribusiness representatives, the Ecuadorian flower industry pays an average of 30% more in air transportation to US and Europe, than Colombia (Palan and Palan 1999, and HOY 2004).

⁶ Section 204(d) of the Andean Trade Preference Act determines that the the US President is granted power to suspend duty-free treatment to any articles if there is adverse affect due to the increased competition. In addition, US producers of perishable products may also appeal to the United States International Trade Commission for emergency relief if they are being negatively impacted by the added imports (See Anderson 2003).

⁷ Embargos to products imported by US due to environmental or food security concerns are a potential measure. Chilean grapes were embargoed in 1989, banning such fruit in US markets. Chile lost about US\$400 million due to this embargo. (See Engel Nd)

These transportation costs erode the competitiveness of Ecuadorian flower industry, and reduce its earnings.

A final problem of the Ecuadorian flower industry is related to the one that a few years ago was supposed to be one of its major benefits: the currencies used in trade and payment of services. As explained, when Ecuador used the *sucre* as national currency, flower producers were greatly benefited by the favorable exchange rate between the US dollars received from international markets and the Ecuadorian *sucres* used to pay salaries and local services. But now that Ecuador uses US dollars as national currency, the cost of labor, utilities, and other services are higher in comparison with other flower producing countries. In addition, countries like Colombia, where there is control of local currency, use devaluations as a policy to control prices, including salaries, which become flexible enough to allow local industry to flourish. Since Ecuador does not control local currency, it cannot use devaluations to balance the internal economy and allow local industry better terms of trade.

All the problems explained above pose a risk to the economic sustainability of the Ecuadorian flower industry. These problems could work together or separately and create instability to this industry, which like other boom like activities, could decline and lose economic importance. If this situation occurs, the illusion of stable jobs for thousand of women would end.

The NTAEs and Peasant Women Households

Structural adjustments provoked by neoliberal policies have affected peasant households from Ecuador and all over Latin America. As analyzed in Chapter 2, peasant households have had a well-established subsistence production system in which women have played a determinant role. Deere (forthcoming) explains that this system was

diminished by a combination of economic crises and unfavorable policies for domestic agriculture under neoliberalism. As a result, peasant households could no longer sustain themselves on the basis of agricultural production alone.

At the same time that unfavorable policies for domestic agriculture were enacted, national governments established favorable conditions for industrial agriculture (NTAEs). This concomitant process at the time that it sank the peasant household source of income, conveniently provided an economic alternative to rural people through NTAEs. Having no chance to continue playing a role in the subsistence agriculture system, as a natural process, women were attracted by the emergent NTAEs.

Thus, the impact of neoliberal policies on peasant households was double. First, the household was deprived of its subsistence economy; and second, income of the men of the household shrank as an effect of the crisis. This meant that to offset the household's income losses, women had to work outside the home. This is part of what Deere (forthcoming) calls "the transference of reproduction costs," which were transferred "from the state to households, and often to the women within them both because of their primary responsibility for domestic labor and because the crisis has required their growing participation in the labor force".

This process of dismantling subsistence economies was associated with the restructuring of the international economy in which women's employment has been as the "reserve labor army, particularly in labor-intensive manufacturing goods such as electronics, garments, and sportswear" (UN 1999 and Pearson 2000). The new areas of development that require female work were those resulting from the structural adjustment programs ordered by the IMF, like the so-called *maquiladoras* and NTAEs.

The predominant fact in this economic scenario is that women are preferred for working in these new production areas, and the evidence is that women are still largely confined to lower paid occupations (Pearson 2000). Indeed, a feature of contemporary globalization is the trend towards the flexibility of labor, including part-time, casual, and informal sector jobs (including home-based work). Women are over-represented in all these sectors (UN 1999). The lower wages offered by the new economic development, is part of the strategy of maintaining competitiveness in international markets. To achieve such competitiveness, these economic activities must take advantage of all the environmental, legislative, social, or gender issues that can be translated into less production costs. The imperative to reduce production costs has even opened the way for child labor. In a report of the *International Labour Organization's International Program to Eradicate Children Work* (IPEC), the use of boys and girls in two of the main flower producing provinces in Ecuador could increase to 80% of adult workers (Castelnuovo 1999:20). This work is hidden in the category of "helpers".

Thus the incorporation of women into the labor market is a strategy to take advantage of the vulnerability of a social group that has few job options and must accept the poor economic and social conditions of their employment. This incorporation of women in capitalist work relations is a kind of proletarianization, the consequence of which is the growing dependence of nuclear households on wages. Deere (1978) notes that this process is the conversion of the household from a unit of direct production to one of consumption.

As in other export activities promoted by trade liberalization measures, it is a debated issue whether NTAE jobs have empowered women. For organizations

promoting free trade liberalization and NTAEs, like USAID, which showed that women employed in agribusiness not only controlled their own earnings but also, due to their status of ‘income earner’, they had “raised their self-esteem and increased their household influence.” (USAID 1999). However, as Carr and Chen (2001) point out, “research elsewhere has highlighted the fact that, because the work on NTAEs is seasonal, there is no sustained increase in women’s status.”

The Gender-Oriented Work Force in the Restructuring of International Industry

The NTAE work opportunities for women are a milestone in the relation between development and women. As has been widely reported, for different reasons historically there was a reluctance to offer paid work to women. Boserup (1970:114) reports that laws banning overtime work for women, providing pregnancy and maternity benefits, and other direct or indirect for women, and even social prejudices against female labor have keep them away from employment opportunities in low income countries. This could be part of the unconscious trend to considerate traditional activities at home as a women’s realm and capitalist waged (modern) work, as male’s realm.

Contrary to such a capitalist trend, NTAEs appeared in the last two decades that not only are willing to provide employment to women, but also appear to be based on women. In Ecuador and elsewhere, women are the main source of workers for the NTAEs. This tendency has not been yet explained, and in some way could be constructed as a mechanism to make economically visible to women. Other explanations for the preference for women workers could rely on biological-psychological, moral-ideological, and economic considerations.

The patience and manual skills attributed to women are among the features that move flower agribusiness in Ecuador to target principally young women when hiring.

Women in this country are most likely to be enlisted as workers in virtually all flower production processes (Palan 1999). The preference for female labor in production work in Ecuador is explained by the idea that flower care is similar to child care, where women assume the responsibility for the entire process of growth, up to harvesting and packaging (Palan 1999:14). Mexican flower producers sustain the same idea. Razavi (2002) transcribed the comment of a female flower manager who stated “plants are like children and must be cared for in order to grow into beautiful plants” (Razavi 2002: 94)

Referring to the Mexican experience, Lara Flores (1995) explains that flower agribusiness managers prefer women because they are more flexible, and they easily accept organizational changes and increased work times, which is important for some rush periods like Valentines and Mother’s Day. In addition, flower agribusiness prefers young women workers because they are flexible enough to rotate into different tasks and even different plantations (Lara Flores 1995: 29).

Another explanation why women are preferred for work in some sectors of the new work scenario in Latin America is the idea that women are more responsible. Analyzing women’s situation in the “maquiladoras” industry in Mexico, Iglesias Prieto (1999) explains that there exists an ideologically constructed perception of the essential nature of women, which implies their putative inferiority as intellectual and political actors. This supposition underlies women’s vocation for and justifies their employment in tedious and repetitive labor (Iglesias Prieto 1999: 29). An Ecuadorian flower agribusiness manager summarized this prejudice saying that “*las mujeres son más detallistas*” (women are more detail oriented) to justify why they are preferred at his plantation. Women’s responsibility, delicateness, docility, confidence, and submission, which in the words of

flower businessmen translated into high levels of productivity, are “feminine qualities” that are an advantage in comparison with male workers (Mena Pozo 1999: 83). These supposed female traits have been used to justify women’s indispensability in some phases of flower production. Noel (1998) relates that efforts towards mechanization have been unsuccessful in Ecuadorian flower plantations due to the delicate nature of the product which requires more sensitive handling than machines have been able to provide (Noel 1998: 23).

The extremely fragility of flowers and the specific standards of the flower market force the flower agribusinesses to maintain a work team flexible enough to perform repetitive and tedious tasks. For example, once harvested, a flower cannot remain in storage more than 24 hours before being shipped to the international markets. If that happens the product must be discarded. During such time, flower’s quality features (color, size, freshness, etc.) must be checked one by one, and workers must be willing and able to deal with such tiresome tasks. Women workers carry out these activities in physical isolation and rarely interact with other workers for hours at a time. Mena Pozo (1999) claims that such tasks are given exclusively to women workers due to their agricultural experience and lower level of education (Mena Pozo 1999: 45).

But the “indispensability” of women for some flower production phases can be unmasked by the fact, as explained by Mena Pozo (1999), that in some flower plantations with advanced technologies, where workers have better labor guarantees and salaries, the presence of female workers is not as preponderant as on other plantations (Mena Pozo 1999: 85). That means that flower agribusinesses use positive and negative gender biases to justify both the contracting preference for women and their lower salaries. Some

authors think that the incorporation of women into capitalist relations of production is not due to women's particular innate skills, but to gain access to inexpensive labor (Beneria and Sen 1997, Deere forthcoming). Under the assumption that women do not have wage work alternatives, factories and other businesses hire women at low wages (White 2000). The lack of (capitalist) labor experience is also a justification for paying women below the regular wages for the same tasks men perform (Lara Flores 1995: 29). Eraydin and Erendil (1999) explain that the volatile conditions of globalized markets have forced producers to seek flexibility to adapt to such conditions. Due to both the bias for women and their unlikely chances of finding other work, they are more likely to accept such flexibility, which means insecure, unhealthy, and lower paid work. The disadvantageous position of women is part of the structure of the labor market itself.

According to this perspective, the labor market is divided between a primary sector, required to meet the technological needs of producers, and a secondary labor market consisting of other workers whose particular skills are expendable and who must, therefore, accept lower wages and insecure conditions. Women are generally confined to the latter (Eraydin and Erendil 1999: 260.) Deere (forthcoming) explains this aspect as a tendency to reserve permanent jobs for men, and to concentrate women in temporary jobs, which is a continuation of the gendered ideology that has pervaded modernization and development paradigms.

Since women are likely to accept lower wages, insecure and unstable work conditions, and still perform the assigned tasks well, there is a preference for economic activities linked with the production of export goods. To have workers that accept such poor work conditions is an economic need to keep factories' profitability at a level that

allows them to be competitive in the international markets. In conclusion, prejudices against women are used in the globalization era to keep international business afloat.

CHAPTER 5
THE WORK OF PEASANT WOMEN IN FLOWER AGRIBUSINESS: THE CASE OF
THE COMMUNITY OF MULAUCO IN THE ECUADORIAN ANDES

Thus far in this thesis the economic, political, and social conditions that have provoked the involvement of rural women in paid work, particularly in the so-called NTAEs, have been examined. Before analyzing the determinant conditions that drove women from Mulauco to work in the NTAE-flower industry, I will show some Latin American experiences of female participation in these types of industry.

Additionally, in this chapter I will analyze the disruption of the traditional household economy in the Mulauco community. This dynamic process will be helpful in the understanding of the involvement of women in flower work since the early 1990s. In the last part of this chapter I will review the changes that the life of the peasant women has experienced due to flower work. This section is based on field-research done in the *Comuna* Mulauco. As was explained in Chapter 1, this field research was conducted using semi-structured and non-structured interviews, which were carried out with 20 people that include current and former women flower workers, some relatives of these women, and flower agribusiness managers.

The NTAEs and Female Work: Experiences from Latin America

In the last two decades, numerous case studies have been published on the impacts on rural women in Latin America of paid work in Non Traditional Agriculture Exports (NTAEs). These analyses, which describe the positive and negative impacts of wage labor on rural women, are relevant to the situation of women from Mulauco, a

community in Ecuador, who work in the flower industry. The studies summarized below by way of introduction, were carried out in Chile, Colombia and Mexico.

Four case studies exist on the experience of Chilean peasant women in NTAES. Of these, two conclude that the integration of rural women in the labor market is completely positive. The workers were employed in fruit production. They have positive feelings about their transformation into wage laborers, a role that has allowed them to discover a new dimension of social life through regular interaction with other women with whom they share experiences, something they had not been able to do as easily prior to joining the work force (Lago Campaña 1984 and Lago Olavarría 1986, cited in Herrera 1999). But in the other two cases, wage labor has had either no effect or a negative effect on women's situation. Bee and Vogel (1997, cited in Dolan and Sorby 2003) found that despite the increasing participation of women in the fruit industry, traditional household gender relations remained largely intact. In another study in the same industry, Aranda (1982, cited in Herrera) reports that women do not feel quite right working outside the home because the long workdays exhaust them and produce social exclusion and social under-valuation (Herrera 1999).

Silva and Medrano (cited in Herrera 1999) studied Colombian women who work in the flower industry. According to the researchers, women's participation is seen as a "mal necesario" (necessary evil). While women appreciate the income they earn, they know that by becoming wageworkers, they also experience disadvantages in society at large and in the family.

Because of the Mexico's long experience with industrialization in rural areas, peasants have had more contact with different levels of paid work. Roldán (1982, cited by

Herrera) indicates that female proletarianization cannot be understood only in terms of the labor / capital relation, but also in terms of other hierarchical relations that influence women's integration into the labor force. These relations that include gender, ethnicity and race, help us to understand gender roles in the local and national contexts (Roldán 1982, cited by Herrera). In addition, the effects on rural women are different depending on whether they are married or single. For married women, working as a wage laborer implies a responsibility added to their domestic tasks, thus doubling their workload. This means not only physical but also social displacement because of the pressures that women feel to do their tasks well and on time (Roldán 1982, cited by Herrera).

The cases transcribed eloquently exemplify how complex the participation of rural women in the capitalist workforce is. In the following sections I will describe the experience of such work participation in the community of Mulauco.

Household and Subsistence Economy Disruption in Mulauco

The household in Mulauco has experienced a sudden transformation in the last two decades. As in all Ecuadorian rural areas, households from Mulauco have relied on subsistence agriculture, which was the predominant system until 1980. Although men were, and still are, the household heads,¹ women's agency was important for the maintenance of the subsistence system. Under their responsibility were some aspects of agricultural activities, which included feeding animals, cropping, harvesting, milking, etc.² Before the trend of working outside the community, some men were linked to the

¹ In some cases women are the heads of households. This happens when men are gone due to divorce or long absences for work in other regions of the country, especially in the Amazon area and Coast.

² Interview with Maria's mother.

neighboring hacienda,³ where they spent most of the day. The rest of the men performed subsistence agriculture in their own land.

The economic transformations that started in the early 1980s, and affected substantially the subsistence agriculture systems in all Latin American countries, forced men and women from Mulauco to leave the community. As in most of the cases of indigenous people, Mulauco's subsistence economy could not survive the effects of the structural adjustments ordered by the IMF and implemented by the national government. As explained in Chapter 4, the traditional economy was undermined, and peasants had to face new economic relations, new social paradigms, and new forms of maintaining the household. Although subsistence agriculture remained as important household's activity, it could not meet all the family's needs. In this new scenario, women were the most affected. The transition³ from subsistence economy to a dependent economy affected women in many ways. First, they were left alone with the remaining family agriculture activities⁴ while men had to work outside home. Second, women were responsible for all the reproductive needs of the family. And third, they eventually also had to leave home to find paid work. Remnants of subsistence agriculture are still performed in Mulauco, where families use their small parcels⁵ for crops of corn, beans, potatoes, lettuce, and carrots. Some animals also are frequently in the *comuna's* households, such as pigs, goats, sheep, cows, turkeys, rabbits, and chickens.

³ Mulauco was the name of the *Hacienda*, which disappeared after 1964, when an agrarian reform was promoted by the Ecuadorian state. As a result, part of the Hacienda Mulauco was distributed among the huasipungueros, who created the *Comuna* Mulauco. The rest of the hacienda remained in the hands of its owner's successors, who live from Quito. (Chapter 1).

⁴ Although agriculture lost its value as main household livelihood, rural families maintained this activity for producing some vegetables and breed some minor animals.

⁵ Family parcels in Mulauco vary from about 16,140 sq. feet (1,500 m.) per family. These lands are becoming smaller due to continuing subdivisions among children.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, men started to work outside of the community as *peones* or *jornaleros* (day laborer) in surrounding towns including Quito. In the beginning of their waged work experience, men from Mulauco targeted the building industry for work,⁶ but they also worked as caretakers, gardeners, and so on. Working in flower plantations was another important occupation for men in Mulauco. Preparation of greenhouses, pesticide application, loading and unloading products, were their main tasks. Some men even decided to work in the coastal and Amazonian regions of Ecuador in banana production and the oil industry, respectively.

By the mid 1980s, some women started to work outside the home, generally as housekeepers in urban houses in Tumbaco, Cumbaya and Quito, and by the late 1980s, all the households heads were involved in work outside the community and many women were also working as housekeepers in nearby towns. Women working as housekeepers could have more stability than some men who worked in construction activities, but the pay was lower.

The mass involvement in flower work in Mulauco began in the 1990s, when the boom of flower plantations occurred in Ecuador.⁷ At the time of the expansion of flower agribusiness in the early 1990s, Mulauco's households were completely dependent on the external economy, which was in a very unstable situation due to currency devaluations and increase of the cost of mass consumption products. In this scenario, Ecuadorian national household income was in a critical situation. Reports of the crisis in Ecuador (and elsewhere in Latin America) during the 1980s and 1990s reflected the very difficult

⁶ Customarily this job is performed weekly and at non-dependant labor relation status. Contractors offer jobs on Monday and they finish on Fridays. This kind of workers whom are called *Jornaleros*, could change job every week, depending how much other contractors are paying for a given week.

⁷ As explained in Chapter 4, the boom of flower activity was generated due to governmental incentives and the US government *Andean Trade Preference Act* (ATPA) signed into law on December 1991.

situation of peasants. Indeed, many peasants could not cope with the crisis, which eventually provoked a massive national and international migration to cities and foreign countries, especially to Spain.⁸

The difficult socioeconomic situation described for Mulauco, was generalized in all Ecuadorian rural areas during the 1980s and 1990s. This situation ensured for flower agribusiness and other NTAEs an eager and abundant workforce disposed to work at virtually any price. Of this workforce, women were the less likely group to find jobs, so any chance of a job offered to them was very welcome.

Leaving Home to Ensure Subsistence: Women's Decision to Work on Flower Plantations

As Pearson (2000) explains for the Latin American situation, the impoverishment in rural areas has meant that women as well as men have had to develop a portfolio of income-earning activities, including petty trade, services and artisan production, to meet the increasing cost of household survival, a task made all the more difficult by the global trend towards user charges on basic social services, including education and health care. In Mulauco, the increasing cost of household survival was also the detonator that pushed men to go to urban areas to find job opportunities in the early 1980s. There, they worked principally as masons. Few men remained in Mulauco working on the few haciendas still active in the area, where they took care of crops, animals, and other related activities. With few exceptions,⁹ women were confined at home involved in domestic activities,

⁸ About 2 and a half million Ecuadorians live outside Ecuador, principally in the United States, Spain, and Italy (Lucas 2002).

⁹ In the early 1980s, there was a temporary involvement of women in a flower agribusiness, but this was a short experience in a small flower plantation named "Hiperactive", involved in the production of *hipericos* (*Hypericum perforatum*), a plant used to make flower bouquets. This plantation principally contracted men as workers, but there were some women as well. After few years of activity, this plantation faced bankruptcy, and then all the workers lost their jobs.

caring for the small land plots growing basic food crops and caring for small animals for family consumption.

Although most of the men from Mulauco were involved in more or less stable jobs, their income never could cover family needs as the subsistence economy did before. This difficult household situation was an effect of the crisis on the national level. During the 1980s, the Ecuadorian government should have taken economic measures to cope with the external debt crisis and two major natural disasters that occurred during these years.¹⁰ Among the economic measures taken during these years were the national currency devaluation,¹¹ and the increase of the price of gasoline. These measures resulted in higher prices of transportation, food, medicines, and other products of mass consumption. In these conditions, the rural households were in a calamitous situation and it was necessary to improve the household's income so far brought in only by men. At this point, the objective circumstances for women entering in the paid workforce were ripe.

As the economic crisis deepened, the female population of Mulauco was the most affected. All the tasks of reproduction under their responsibilities (preparing food, caring for children, health, education, etc) were achieved with a tiny budget. The obvious solution in this condition was to reduce the quality and quantity of the family's pattern of consumption. Meals and medicine were held at minimal levels. Many processed foods were kept off the shopping list, and most of the daily meals were cooked with the few products of the family plot. Usually women even ignored some medicines prescribed by

¹⁰ In addition to the global economic conditions that lead to the crisis during the 1980s, Ecuador faced the negative effects of one of the strongest ENSO (El Niño Southern Oscillation) during 1982-1983, and an earthquake in 1987, which caused several hundred deaths, and the destruction of important parts of the national pipeline. These natural events worsened the economic crisis in the country.

¹¹ To combat the inflation at least temporarily, Ecuador made periodic devaluations of the *Sucre*, its former currency. In 1980, the Ecuadorian sucre / US dollar conversion was 27 sucres = 1 US dollar. When sucre was suppressed, the conversion rate was 25,000 sucres = 1 US dollar.

doctors and only bought those affordable by the family income. Since family welfare was in a very risky situation, women were forced to find a source of an additional income. Many of these women began to work as housekeepers in Quito, Tumbaco and Cumbaya areas. Housekeeping was the first job women sought in the first wave of paid work involvement during the mid 1980s, and was opted for only by those families in extremely poor conditions. Since the housekeeping labor force offered during these years was abundant, this activity was kept at a very low payment.¹²

When the flower industry boom started in the early 1990s,¹³ it offered attractive salaries. This salary was higher than those offered to women as housekeepers. So, women decided to apply for jobs, leading to massive female involvement in flower work. Due to appropriate climate conditions of the area, several plantations were set up in Pifo, where Mulauco is located.

The underlying motive that moved women from Mulauco to work in flower plantations was exclusively the lack of income brought home by men. All the women that started to work on flower plantations in the early 1990s were concerned about the family's survival, and not in getting independence from men's influence or achieving a better social status. Former female flower workers I interviewed said that they started working in plantations with the idea of temporary work. They thought of their jobs as a way to provide concrete temporary necessities of the family, such as to pay an overdue loan, house repair, to increase the family land, and other specific expenses. This

¹² During the 1980s and early 1990s, the difference of wages between housekeeping and flower work was substantial: Housekeepers earned about US\$ 40 and flower workers about US\$ 100. Nowadays, such difference is minor: housekeepers earn from US\$120 to 140 monthly, and a flower worker earns from US\$140 to 280, including overtime. Due to work conditions, some women have withdrawn from flower labor and now work as housekeepers (interview with Susana Quilumba).

¹³ As explained in Chapter 4, the boom of flower activity was generated due to governmental incentives and the US government *Andean Trade Preference Act* (ATPA) signed into law on December 1991.

conviction of temporariness, which also has been noted in other studies on women's work on flower plantations in Ecuador, made women more tolerant of the exploitative conditions of the flower plantations (Dolan and Sorby 2003:32).

But although the work conditions were difficult, women experienced a new and favorable situation: having their own earnings and control of income. With their income, women could not only obtain material improvements like better family meals, but also reinvent themselves as social actors, and achieve some individual improvements like self-esteem, and self-security.

In the following section, I will transcribe the experiences of the women from Mulauco as workers in the flower industry. These experiences are more focused in how the women's life has been transformed in the two most important realms, personal (the women for themselves), and family.

Flower Employment and Daily Life: Vignettes

As part of the research for this thesis, I interviewed seven female flower workers, three single women, two married women, one single mother, and one former female worker. The information from these women gives an idea of how flower work has transformed the daily life of women. I decided also to interview a former flower worker to have a perspective from a different angle of flower work experience.

Since the responses about the personal perceptions of being flower workers were comparable among the interviewed women, I decided to consolidate the responses of the single women and married women under one vignette for each group. The names correspond to the woman worker which responses covered deeply the questions on the situations of interest for this thesis. Therefore, what follows are the narratives of Teresa,

Maria, Zoila, and Rosa, about their perceptions on how the flower work has changed their lives.

Teresa

Single women workers are generally between 18 and 23 years old and live with their parents. One of the single women flower workers I met is Teresa who is the most representative case in the group of single workers.¹⁴ She is 19 years old and lives in her parents' house, and has been working in a flower plantation for 9 months. She studied until the third course of high school, and then took some sewing classes. After that, when she was 17 years old, she found work as a housekeeper in Quito. Once there was chance to work at a flower plantation, she quit that job because the plantation is closer to her home, and she envisaged a better future working in a flower company. As she told me, she liked to work in flower activities because "it belongs to companies", denoting with this statement the importance for her to be a part of an institution, that is not personal servitude.¹⁵

Since Teresa is working in the flower industry, her life has experienced some important changes that allow her to have better conditions than what she could have without a job. These changes are related to income, self-reliance, opportunities to socialize, and to enjoy free time.

The amount of money that Teresa earns every month is probably more than what she needs, considering that she lives in her parent's house. For that reason she does not have major fixed expenses such as rent, utility bills, etc., so her wages allow savings of

¹⁴ The other women workers were Paulina and Emperatriz.

¹⁵ Although young women could refuse to be housekeepers, other women that have already experienced flower employment, like to work as housekeepers because of the salary and because less effort is needed. (Interview with Susana Quilumba).

small amounts of money periodically. Due to this advantage, Teresa was able to help with some house necessities. For example, she goes grocery shopping twice a month, bringing home rice, sugar, beans, noodles, etc. She also gives some money to her mother. She contributes occasionally to the maintenance of the house like roof and plumbing repairs, painting, and other necessities. She feels that this assistance is much appreciated by her parents, who show some additional affection and a kind of pride in their working daughter. She likes to help not only because she feels it is a moral obligation, but also because by doing that, her parents are more permissive with her, especially if she wants to go to meet friends, to parties, and other enjoyments.

Teresa spends the rest of her wages buying clothes, and in fixing up her bedroom, which includes a stereo, TV set, etc. Her room is different from those of other family members', which are simpler. Now, she feels secure to go to a store and buy something she likes, even if the price is beyond her monthly income, in which case she can buy on installment. Occasionally she goes to a bar or movie with other workers. Since Teresa is out of the home during the day, she avoids some home duties typically done by young women like cleaning the house, helping in the kitchen, caring for minor animals, etc. On weekends she gets involved in some house chores like cleaning, or washing clothes.

Besides her purchasing ability, Teresa is happy to have the chance to socialize. The flower work provides her an opportunity to leave home and be away from parental control. Now she attends parties, meetings, and sport events organized on the flower plantation. Within her family, the social gatherings she could attend were basically in the village and family parties. Now she feels more secure to go to meetings and parties,

which was not the case in the past. She remembers that even when she worked as a housekeeper, she never went to a party alone without a relative.

When I asked how does she think the community sees her since she is a flower worker? Teresa responded that she thinks the community assumes that now she can stand by herself, which mean that she can buy her own things, attend meetings and parties alone, and use her own money. As a consequence, people tend to be more polite and respectful with her. Sometimes Teresa is asked to give a contribution for a communal event, which could be interpreted as forms of recognizing her new role.

The work in the flower plantation itself provides Teresa a sense of security or empowerment that she did not have when she was a housekeeper. Actually she did not consider housekeeping a “real” job, as is the flower industry occupation. While a housekeeper, she was only in contact with the family where she worked. Now she has several friends to meet every day.

Since she works for a flower plantation, Teresa cannot attend communal activities. Besides, she does not consider it important to attend *mingas*, and *comuna* meetings because her parents do that for the family. Actually, family heads generally perform communal activities, so young people like Teresa do not yet have a specific responsibility within the organization.

Regarding problems that Teresa could point to from her flower work, she explains that the only thing she dislikes is doing tiring activities like standing in a static position all the time in front of a table classifying flowers, or kneeling on the ground caring for growing flowers. Working in these positions produces physical pain. Working over time

is not a problem for Teresa, even if it is at the night. She likes these opportunities because she earns extra money.

To my question about whether she feels that she has learned something new by working in a flower plantation, Teresa thinks that she has learned many things that help her to be better prepared to face life in the future. For that reason, she would like to work as long as possible in the plantation. It is not in her plans to quit her job soon, and indeed she does not know what she would do if that happens. She seems surprised thinking about a possible interruption in her job. She does not seem to have any plan if it happens.

Teresa does not know about health problems due to pesticide contamination. When I asked her if she cares about this, she says that she is not afraid of that because where she works there is no use of pesticides.

Maria

I interviewed two married women. The first one is Maria.¹⁶ She is the most representative in terms of how women can manage their job and home duties. Maria¹⁷ is 27 years old and she works in a plantation near to Mulauco, where she enrolled one and a half years ago. She is married to Manuel, who is a mason and works mostly in Quito in temporary jobs. They have two children. The girl is seven, and the boy is eight years old. Both of them attend school in Mulauco. They live in a 2-room house on a 1.500 m²¹⁸ of land. On this land, Maria's family has some small plots of potatoes, carrots, beans, onions, and corns. These products are for family consumption. They also have two cows,

¹⁶ The other married woman worker interviewed is Hilda.

¹⁷ Maria was my main acquaintance in *Comuna* Mulauco. I met her the first time in the summer of 2002, when I was searching for places for my fieldwork. Maria helped me to contact women flower workers of the area. Since the best time to meet with women workers was at night, I decided to stay at Maria's house, which provided me an opportunity to share and understand her daily life.

¹⁸ Little bit less than half an acre.

several hens, and rabbits. Occasionally, when there are products to spare, they are bartered with relatives and neighbors for other products.

Maria wakes up every day at 5:00 am to have enough time to prepare breakfast for her family, school- lunch for her kids, and to prepare the children's clothes for the day. Both Maria and her husband head to their jobs at 6:30 am. The children study from 7:00 am to 1:30 pm. When the children come back home after classes, their parents are not there yet. After school, before their parents arrive at home, the children usually play with other children around the neighborhood or visit relatives who live close by. Maria gets home around 5:00 pm. Her husband arrives around 6:30 pm. After preparing food and doing some home tasks, Maria's family goes to bed around ten at night. However, she sometimes stays awake until 11:00 making sure that everything is ready for the next day.

Maria works from 7:30am to 4:00pm¹⁹ in *Sigsapamba*, which is 20 minutes by car from Mulauco. She spends around one hour and a half everyday traveling from her house to her work and back. Since her house is not close to the road, she needs to walk about 20 minutes to get the bus. The flower company provides transportation only when there is overtime work at night.

The decision to work at a flower plantation was agreed upon between Maria and her husband, but she took the initiative. She decided to undertake this activity since her husband's earnings were not sufficient to cover the family's basic needs. She was attracted to work on flower plantations because of the pay. Before the flower job, she worked occasionally on a nearby hacienda for a few hours a day.

The schedule at the flower plantations does not allow women to effectively combine work and motherhood duties. When children get sick it is hard to get time off.

¹⁹ Before special dates like Valentines' and Mother's Day, the workday can last about 12 hours.

In the case of Maria, she only asks for time off when her kids are seriously ill. This is generally when children have a high fever, or are complaining of severe headache or other pain. When the children have a cold or the flu, which are common in the cold season, Maria does not get time off and must go to work. In these cases, Maria usually asks her neighbors to keep an eye on the sick child. Maria's husband cannot stay at home and care for the children when they get sick. He works in construction in Quito where every day workers are selected. If he is absent, somebody else could replace him. The difficulty of staying at home more time is something really stressful for Maria, because she is conscious that her children are not having enough care from her. The lack of time to be at home longer makes Maria frustrated because she can hardly care and control her children's activities, especially school homework.

On Saturdays, Maria works from 8:00 until noon. After work, she does grocery shopping in Pifo town and she comes back home around 3:00 pm. Then she feeds her kids and asks them to do their homework to be free to play the rest of the weekend. On Sundays, Maria tries to do some house tasks that cannot be performed during weekdays²⁰. She cleans the house, washes the clothes, and cares for the domestic animals and the family crops. But the day becomes short with all these activities that she would like to accomplish at home. As a result, she often does everything with less attention than when she was not working in flower plantations. As a way to share time with the children, Maria watches TV with them while she irons the clothes.

²⁰ Dolan and Sorby (2003:44) cite a study on Ecuadorian flower workers where over half of the women interviewed, spent 3 to 4 hours every day performing domestic tasks in addition to wage employment in the industry.

Maria manages the money she earns²¹. Maria spends her salary completely on family needs, principally on food, medicines, and clothes for her children. Before her work at the flower plantation, she used to ask for money from her husband for every house necessity. Generally he was reluctant to give money for something he considered unnecessary, or that he thought was already purchased. Now, Maria does the grocery shopping, and pays other expenses after receiving her salary, before going home. Her husband pays for utilities bills, materials for home maintenance, small appliances, and some school supplies for their children, etc. Both make the decision to undertake special expenses like buying a TV, furniture, or a piece of land. These shared decisions happened very often, even when Maria was not yet working.

Normally Maria and her husband get along well. But occasionally, when he is drunk, disagreements can happen. This occurs often on Fridays. When it happens, it is likely that the drunken husband behaves somewhat irrationally and even violently. This behavior was more frequent before Maria got a job at the flower plantation. Now it occurs sporadically. Family disagreements also arise when her husband cannot find a job. In such cases, Manuel tries to search for a job in nearby towns. If Manuel does not find a job for several days, he becomes irritated and is likely to start arguing with Maria for any minor reason.

Because of Maria's employment at the flower plantation, she explains that her husband appears more attentive with her. Although he is not involved in some house tasks because he does not see them as part of his role, he tends to compensate by increasing his own tasks. He tries to engage in some home improvements in which he

²¹ Another woman worker I interviewed used to "put together" her money with her husband's money, then both decide house expenses.

becomes enthusiastic. For example while I was doing my field research, Maria's husband, who is a mason, was building a home extension to have two additional rooms.

When Maria started working, her dream was to raise money to make some house improvements and buy some more land, so she could start a small business raising pigs, chickens, or rabbits. Her idea was that once she achieved these goals, she would quit the flower work and be more involved in a household business. But her ideas have changed after she realized that what she earns does not allow for any savings. Besides, she feels that as a worker, she has an important role, which is significant for her and for her family's survival.

Although Maria is conscious that being a flower worker, a mother, and a household worker is somewhat overwhelming, she likes to have the chance to work. She resents the lack of time for her children. She feels that it is her fault. However, the cost/benefit calculation she makes suggests that she keep working. She reflects that the current economic situation offers two options: staying at home to care for her children, and suffering deprivations, or going out to work, decreasing time for the children and obtaining some cash to provide them better food and education. Both decisions have a high cost, but she prefers the second option that permits ensuring household subsistence, despite the distress of leaving her children alone.

Maria considers that flower work has not offered her any special knowledge, because everything she does there, she used to do at home. While she is not necessarily interested in continuing working for the flower industry, she would like to always have a job in the future.

From brochures that she has read recently, Maria knows about the use of dangerous pesticides in the plantations. Even though she is concerned about being affected by pesticides, Maria thinks that it is more dangerous when women are pregnant, which is not her case.

Zoila

Another women worker I interviewed was Zoila, who is 22 years old and a single mother. She has a 2-year old boy. Zoila has worked in a flower plantation for one year. She decided to work there due to the restricted income in her parents' home where she lives. Zoila's parents are displeased that their daughter has a child without being married or at least in a de facto relation. After the child was born, her parents have accepted this situation with a better attitude. Since Zoila has a baby but not a husband, her parents acquire a kind of right to control her social activities and to demand certain behavior from her.

For Zoila, the opportunity to find a job in flower plantations was extremely desirable. For her, it is not only an economic necessity, but also a psychological one. Since her parents control her, she needs any excuse to leave home every day. Zoila spends work earnings principally on her child's needs. These could be food, medicines, clothes, toys, and recreational activities. In addition, she contributes to some household needs like food (rice, sugar, noodles, and others), utilities bills, etc. and gives a small amount of money to her mother every month. When possible, a small part of the wage is deposited in a saving account in a *cooperativa* (credit union), but any accrued sum could

suddenly be used in a single necessity only, like bringing Zoila's child to the emergency room,²² or shopping for Christmas.

While working, Zoila leaves her child at home with his grandparents. But, as she says, some working mothers bring their children to work. If the child does not walk yet, he/she is carried on the mother's back covered with a blanket, in the particular way Andean mothers carry their children when they are babies. If the child is walking, s/he will spend her/his time by the mother's side playing with a toy.²³ Otherwise the child will be in a nearby shady place while the mother is working.

Although the flower job takes most of her time and is the cause of some stress, Zoila likes the job. What she earns from her job is enough for her current necessities. She would love to have a better job, but at this time she is happy with what she has. Besides the bi-weekly check she receives, the flower work keeps her in touch with the world. She thinks that without a job, her life would be dull at home. She would spend her daily life only caring for her child, doing tedious house chores, and basically being under her parent's surveillance all the time if she did not have a job. Besides, her boy would suffer a lot of material privations.

The unmarried female worker with children presents a different personal situation as a result of being waged worker. She needs to combine her condition of single mother, worker, and member of the extended family in which she still lives. In the case of Zoila, she has a vital responsibility that she cannot avoid. She needs to feed her child, prepare food, and do other regular tasks at home. Fortunately the kinship network performs some of her home tasks. Workers' parents, siblings, and other relatives care for her child while

²² That happened when the boy got bronchitis.

²³ Not all the flower agribusiness allows single mothers to bring children. It appears that only small flower companies are willing to accept that, due to the fact that most of them lack childcare facilities.

she is at work. Such transferring of childcare responsibility is extremely helpful for Zoila, and is the only way she could work. However, her involvement in waged work is stressful because of the difficulties of managing her child and work responsibilities. She cannot refuse such a job opportunity because it is the only chance to earn some cash that provides a certain sense of independence.

Zoila, who is the only single-mother women I interviewed, explains that she decided to work basically to alleviate the economic burden on her parents in whose home she lives. By working, she makes up some of the trouble that having a baby without an established marital relation meant. Her parents see the fact that she is working as the achievement of a kind of security. I interpret this as an unconscious representation of the “absent husband.” In other words, parents assume wage work to mean family security.

With the same workload as single workers, the single-mother flower worker has a different mind set. Zoila lives to provide her own children’s necessities and to appear responsible to her parents who are likely to censor every demonstration of agency by her. A particular concern of Zoila’s parents is that she expends time after work in trivial pursuits like shopping or socializing with friends. Her parents would like her to use her free time as much as possible caring her child and helping at home.

Like all the women workers interviewed, Zoila controls what to do with her income. She spends her wage buying clothes, toys, medicine, and other products for her child. Sometimes she buys a fashionable piece of clothes for her child in the town’s store, which generally is paid in installments over two or three months. Of course she must also contribute monthly to house expenses. Zoila has also managed to save some money at the local credit union.

Work involvement on the flower plantation is an important thing in Zoila's life. She thinks that this experience is helpful for the future. Due to her age, and this being her first job, Zoila feels that she has learned a lot of useful things at the flower plantation. Among these useful things she mentions understanding and following some regulations to conduct her work, and coordinating her work with other people toward a common goal. Zoila seemed puzzled when I asked her about future plans. She hesitated to respond. Then, she said that she would like to keep working on a flower plantation as long as possible.

As will be discussed later, the different social circumstances in which the three types of women I interviewed are immersed generate different social outcomes. Age and marital status are among the main definers of satisfaction as a result of work experience. Of course, beyond these personal situations there could be other definers of the self-perceptions regarding working experience.

Despite the different social circumstances and outcomes, the three types of women I have interviewed share some similarities in self-perception and work experience. The most notable aspects in which these women are similar are in wage management. All the interviewed women manage their salary for themselves. In the case of married women, it is unconsciously assumed that the money they earn corresponds to their realm in the household (reproductive activities like providing food, medicines, etc.). This aspect is more or less common among the Ecuadorian women flower workers²⁴ and could correspond with the traditional gender relations and roles of women in household. In

²⁴ In a study on women flower workers carried out in 1993 it was recorded that more than 80% of women working in the Ecuadorian flower industry managed their own wages (CEPLAES 1993, cited in Dolan and Sorby 2003)

some cases in Mulauco, the earnings of the two spouses are combined to create a single fund to cover family necessities.

Another aspect in which all types of female flower workers shared similar perceptions is regarding the importance they give to working in waged work. Recognizing the difficulties undergone by working in a demanding and exhausting activity, they still feel personally gratified with the working experience. They are aware that the economic situation in the country is not easy, so they could be worse off if they did not have a job.

A final perception of women workers is that although some would like to withdraw from flower work due to the extended schedule, difficult work conditions, and low salaries,²⁵ all of them have decided to keep working in paid work. This decision is unanimous and independent of how much husband's or parent's income is. The words of one of my interviewed workers who explained to me that she "does not like to lose what she has achieved", are noteworthy. She meant that her involvement with paid work has exposed her to broader social and economic realities.

²⁵ Salaries in flower industry for women workers range between US \$140 and \$180, without overtime.

CHAPTER 6
EMPOWERMENT OR ADAPTATION? HOW JOBS IN THE FLOWER INDUSTRY
AFFECT THE FEMALE WORK FORCE IN MULAUCO

Access to wage labor does not automatically improve the situation of women, nor does it always disrupt the social fabric. Nevertheless, the consequences of women's participation in the work force, both for society and the individuals involved, can be affected by prevailing social, economic, and cultural conditions. As explained in Chapter 2, waged work has been an element in the change of traditional female roles, particularly in rural areas in Latin America where the situation of women is firmly rooted in cultural factors.

In this chapter I will discuss how work in the flower industry has positively or negatively affected women from Mulauco. To understand the weight of the flower industry in the national context, I have included in the beginning of this chapter, a review of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of flower plantations.

To place the positive and negative impacts of flower work on women in a theoretical perspective, I also review the empowerment of women framework, and discuss the elements that should be understood for the achievement of such empowerment. I finalize this chapter with a schematic view of the family, communal and personal gains or losses that women experience from their work participation.

Impacts of the Flower Industry in Ecuador

As with any social process, the growth of the flower industry and the subsequent generation of job opportunities for peasant women in Ecuador have different outcomes in

economic, social, and environmental terms. These outcomes have an impact not only on the local level but also throughout the country.

Since the flower industry appeared in Ecuador during a period of crisis manifested in much higher prices for consumer goods and the loss or decrease in other job opportunities, people from rural areas saw this business as a lifesaver. Korovkin (2002) mentions that flower agribusiness compensated for the effects of the deepening crisis of peasant agriculture, and was also the first economic activity that offered jobs for women, the social group least likely to find a job in rural areas. The job market created by the flower industry has also reduced the migration of rural people to urban areas (Mena Pozo 1999). While traditional agricultural activities provide jobs for 0.3 to 3 people per hectare, flower plantations require from 11 to 13 people for the same area (Mena Pozo 1999). This job-generating characteristic of flower agribusiness cannot be matched by any other public or private sector activity in rural Ecuador. Based on studies by the Corporación Financiera Nacional (the Ecuadorian investment and finance entity), Palan & Palan (1999) cite that around 30,000 workers are indirectly employed in various flower-related activities, including the plastic, paper, cardboard, lumber and agro-chemical industries, as well as transport and services. For every job generated in the flower industry, 1.5 are created in collateral industries, whether as input suppliers or service providers. Such indirect employment is significant for the country, given that the products do not lend themselves to further processing. Forest plantations, for example, as a result of being integrated into a wider production chain, generate four indirect jobs for every agricultural job (Palan & Palan 1999: 17).

Another contribution of the flower industry, described by Palan & Palan (1999), is the impact of flower plantation employees on the country's development through changes in consumption patterns. Sales of electrical appliances and other consumer goods have increased in flower industry areas, where large discount stores have appeared. In macroeconomic terms, flower plantations contribute significantly to the national economy. Flower producers claim to be a leading source of income generation. According to Exploflores, an organization representing flower growers in Ecuador, flower exports have increased in the last five years from \$160,951,000 in 1998 to \$309,597,000 in 2003. The industry is thus in third place, nationally, as a generator of export earnings.

But the positive economic impacts of the flower industry are accompanied by negative social, environmental and health impacts, especially for the rural areas directly influenced by this activity. Violence and delinquency have been associated with the flower industry. With an increase in job opportunities, there is an influx of people from other places of the country into flower growing areas, and this has increased violence in traditionally peaceful areas, as well as prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases (Castelnuovo et al 2000: 74).

The flower growers' increasing demand for land also causes social problems, including intense pressure on indigenous and peasant people to sell their lands. Castelnuovo et al (2000) point to the existence of "industrial terrorism" to scare indigenous people into selling their farms. Flower companies also employ divide-and-conquer strategies in their dealings with indigenous organizations to convince members of communes to sell land that is collectively owned. For instance, companies allow some

comuneros (community members) to independently contract workers from the indigenous community for the flower plantations. These indigenous contractors receive a portion of the low wage offered, giving rise to a new social class and disrupting unity in the community (Castelnuovo et al 2000: 82), a practice that undermines the traditional value of solidarity in indigenous communities.

Cultural changes also have been linked to the flower industry. Communal activities strongly immersed in local culture have been affected by the presence of the flower industry. Cultural celebrations or gatherings, such as mingas (communal work activities), are diminishing in importance due to the introduction of activities related to the flower industry, such as sports, parties and Christmas and other celebrations. Peasant flower workers cannot attend local gatherings due to their work schedule. Of course, this cultural loss is linked not only to the flower industry, but to the general process of development and economic crisis, which plays a pervasive role in undermining cultural practices. One of the women I interviewed¹ explained that due to the economic situation in Mulauco, the *priostazgo*,² a distinctive aspect of local culture, has been lost in the last few years. The importance of Corpus Christi, a traditional religious celebration in Mulauco, is also declining.³

The increasing use of land by flower growers also leads to the reduction of other economic activities. For example, in flower growing areas, the production of milk, meat, potatoes, and other agriculture products has declined.

¹ Interview with Susana Quilumba.

² A *prioste* is a man who presides over a yearly communal festivity, generally religious in nature. The position is an important one, bestowed annually on the head of a household recognized in his community for his honor and prosperity. Besides presiding over the festivities, the *prioste* must cover a good portion of the cost of the communal celebration, including food, contest prizes, the mass offered, etc. (Interview with Susana Quilumba).

³ Interview with Susana Quilumba.

The labor intensive character of the flower industry has increased the use of child labor, a practice detected in the main flower plantation areas of Ecuador, including Pifo, the parish in which Mulauco is located. In their analysis of age groups working in the flower industry, Dolan and Sorby (2003) calculate that 86 % of women workers are between 15 and 29 years old, a figure suggesting that many workers may be below 18, the age at which an individual becomes an adult in Ecuador. A report by the *International Labour Organization's International Program to Eradicate Child Labor* (IPEC) indicates that children may account for as much as 20% of the work force in two of Ecuador's main flower producing provinces (Castelnuovo 1999:20).

Flower plantations also cause environmental problems because of the extensive use of pesticides. Since flower markets seek perfect products, flower producers regularly apply significant amounts of dangerous pesticides for pest control. This practice is contaminating local areas and putting workers and residents at risk. In addition, the toxic wastes generated by flower production are not generally treated before being discharged into the water system (Mena Pozo 1999). Tests carried out in rivers next to flower plantations reveal water contaminated by pesticide residues. Mena Pozo (1999: 73) notes that flower residues are used to feed cattle and produce compost, which contaminates milk and crops grown with said compost. Farmers in surrounding areas also use pesticides on their plots, increasing the risks to the local population. It has also been reported that plastic wastes from some flower plantations are burned regularly near populated areas, causing air contamination.

Castelnuovo et al (2000) report that pesticide poisoning is one of the ten major causes of deaths and morbidity in Cayambe, the main flower production area in Ecuador.

Health problems on flower plantations include throat, respiratory and lung problems, frequent headaches and cataracts. As noted in Chapter 4 of this thesis, contamination due to misuse or extensive use of pesticides could lead to diminish demand for Ecuadorian flowers in international markets.

The intensive use of pesticides in flower plantations puts the health of workers, especially women, at risk. Harari (2003) states that between 25% and 50% of flower workers (male and female) leave the job as part of the flower rotational system.⁴ Of these workers, 20% leave their jobs due to health problems related to pesticide exposure.

Which Outcomes are of Interest for Women Workers?

The question as to whether women are better or worse off as a result of their participation in the capitalist labor market raises other issues related to labor and women's rights. To answer the question, it is important to determine what we mean by "better" and "worse" when discussing women and their relation with wage labor.

Improving women's situation, within the framework of this thesis, means providing the objective / subjective elements that will help them to overcome the disadvantages stemming from their family and social situation, characterized by gender inequality. Worsening women's situation means creating conditions that we can reasonably expect will lead to a situation in which women's lives are worse than they were before the employment experience. As will be seen below, the response is not simple and straightforward, but involves the complex of elements that make up the reality of women who work in the flower industry.

⁴ As explained in Chapter 4, flower plantations take advantage of what is called "labor flexibility", which means that jobs are temporary and include no benefits, such as social security, workers' compensation, paid vacations, etc.

To determine whether women are better off or not as a result of their work experience, I will use the “empowerment of women” framework, which seeks to understand how women can overcome gender inequalities.

Due to the diversity of situations, there is not a single concept regarding the elements that comprise “empowerment.” The simplest explanation is provided by Kabeer (1999), who explains the empowerment is the process through which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire that ability. Stromquist (2002) maintains that empowerment consists of the following dimensions: cognitive (the critical understanding of one’s reality), psychological (self-esteem), political (the awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize); and economic (the capacity to generate independent income). Deere and Leon (2000) understand empowerment as a process in which women “gain control over their own lives and define their own agendas.” According to Malhotra et al (2002, cited in Dolan and Sorby 2003:43), four elements define the empowerment of women: options, choice, control, and power. These terms generally represent women's ability to make decisions and to create outcomes of significance to themselves and their families, and include what Parpart (2002:4) describes as “both individual conscientization (*power within*) as well as the ability to work collectively, which can lead to politicized *power with* others, which provides the *power to* bring about change.” In this sense, empowerment must be seen as an opportunity for women to raise their consciousness and exercise their rights.

All these descriptions of the empowerment of women include the achievement of objective and subjective elements that allow women to acquire resources and personal agency. As applied to the reality experienced by female flower workers in Ecuador,

empowerment should be understood in terms applicable to peasant women. In the interests of this study, I have chosen the following practical aspects as the key elements for the empowerment of women: job availability, income, career opportunities, social networks, knowledge, experience, and stability. These elements are generally present in the job opportunities available to male peasants, and it is thus not unrealistic to assume that they should be open to women as well.

Are Female Workers from Mulauco Being Empowered by Their Jobs in the Flower Industry?

The question of whether women workers from Mulauco employed as wage labor in the flower industry are being empowered cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. As demonstrated below, this case study indicates that the outcomes of this gendered experience are not homogenous, but, rather, extremely varied, depending on how outside employment activities are related to household responsibilities. Consequently, empowerment /disempowerment could be encouraged by employment in flower plantations in certain aspects of a woman's life, though not necessarily in all the private and social realms in which she functions.

According to my data and observations, employment in the flower industry leads to different impacts for every worker. I suggest three factors that could determine the level of empowerment / disempowerment that women experience as a result of their involvement in the flower industry: age, marital status, and the responsibility for children. These factors, which are not only cultural determinants but also physical limits that women cannot ignore, are linked with specific roles and responsibilities.

These physical limits are determined by gender or family relations, that is, the presence of parents, husband and/or children, who are powerful modifiers of female

roles. As will be seen below, the presence of these modifiers represents a challenge for women in terms of their involvement in the work force. In light of these elements, the effects on women of employment in the flower industry are related to the personal, family and social or communitarian realms in which women lead their lives.

Based on the above, to determine the empowerment / disempowerment that flower employment implies for women workers, I have organized my analysis of the central concept of “flower plantation work” according to the three types of women generally involved (single, married and single mother), and the three realms of interest to women (family, personal and community). Then I discuss whether the elements of empowerment (job availability, career opportunities, social networks, knowledge, stability, self-esteem and income), are present or not in the social relation of women – flower employment, or are an outcome of said relations.

The Impact of Employment on Women Workers

Flower work has been a source of benefits and problems for women. In their analysis of the Ecuadorian flower industry, Dolan and Sorby (2003:46) explain that employment in the flower industry provides women with certain tangible and intangible gains, including income, which promote a degree of autonomy, and types of socialization that could bolster women's "human capital.” But women also pay a price when they work in the industry, basically due to poor working conditions and the lack of job security, as well as the increased demands on their time, which affect their health and well-being and that of their families.

This mix of improvements and setbacks is evident in all the narratives of women workers. But these mixed impacts affect women in different ways, depending on their marital status. By briefly reviewing these narratives (Chapter 5), in the following section

I will explain how employment in the flower industry affects different types of women. I will analyze only single and married women since the situation of flower workers who are single mothers is a combination of that of single and married women.

In the following analysis, I will use responses to interview questions, in which these women expressed their feelings, perceptions, and plans regarding their experience in the flower industry. When necessary, I will explain how realistic their perceptions and plans may be, in light of what is known about the flower industry in Ecuador.

For single women, a job in a flower plantation can represent their best chance for achieving empowerment. These young women, the majority of flower workers, do not yet have specific family or social responsibilities in Mulauco. With the exception of helping with household tasks, they do not have family responsibilities that require daily attention. Teresa is one of the single flower workers I interviewed. She appeared very happy and proud of her work, which provides the material base to satisfy her needs. As she stated during the interview, her income allows her to exercise agency in various situations, and this puts her in a favorable position as regards her family. Since she lives with her parents, she helps out with household expenses, and family members appreciate this.

Because she earns a wage, Teresa has been able to establish her own social network. This network is not connected to the family network, as is usually the case in the community, but is her own personal network. She has been able to create a personal environment in accord with her wishes: she has fixed up her room and bought some appliances, clothes, and other personal items. All these achievements result in personal fulfillment, which is a source of happiness. In addition, in the traditional environment to

which she belongs, it is clear that she counts in and of herself and not because of her family.

In a psychological context, by working on a flower plantation, Teresa has found a means through which she can develop her social and economic contribution to society. In other words, wage labor is for her an objective form of social participation, in opposition to unemployment, which in real terms results in marginalization from society. This psychological gain provides Teresa with self-confidence and self-esteem. Moreover, she explained that not only has her job afforded a means for social participation, but also a way to gain experience and knowledge, which will reinforce such participation in other endeavors.

In concrete terms, Teresa's income provides purchasing power, a way to solidify family relations, a social network, self-esteem, and social respect. It does not matter whether or not Teresa's perception of the benefits her job offers is realistic. In fact, as I will explain below, those benefits are likely to be temporary. What counts is that Teresa feels good about them.

In conclusion, from her subjective point of view, Teresa who may represent the single young Ecuadorian female flower worker, has achieved income, social networks, better family relations (by helping her parents to support the household), self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of agency through employment in the flower industry. In formal terms, Teresa has been empowered.

Notwithstanding her own perceptions, Teresa's achievements are not firmly grounded. The reality of employment in the flower industry involves a number of hidden costs that in the mid and long terms could outweigh the benefits. In addition, Teresa may

be mistaken in her perceptions of some of the benefits. This is due in part to her age and lack of experience in the world of work. She is 19 years old; most flower workers are below 25 years of age. Therefore, she is not necessarily aware of her future role or the effects of her job in the long term. For example, a familiar practice in the flower industry is to hire only young women, which means that female workers are dismissed after only a few years (1.22 years is the average period of employment (see Palan and Panal 1999, and Harari 2003). Although she is aware of the practice, Teresa cannot appreciate how limited her time on the job will be. Thus, Teresa has made decisions based on the assumption of stable employment (Chapter 5, Teresa's vignette).

In addition to this unfounded assumption regarding employment stability, Teresa has made additional false assumptions. There are no career opportunities in the flower industry for female workers, who comprise 74% of the workers in the production area of flower industry.

The lack of adequate security could be interpreted as one of the hidden costs of employment in the flower industry. The flower industry does not offer protection for women's health (Harari 2003). The pervasive use of pesticides in the industry is widely known. The practice may lead to the banning of Ecuadorian flowers in important international markets (Chapter 4). Health researchers have discovered that pesticides accumulate in fatty tissue in the human body and are stored over time. These chemicals potentially have more adverse effects when stored in women's bodies, because said effects could be transmitted to children (Guillette 1998). It is shocking to read descriptions, like the following, about the effects of these toxins on female health:

Up to now, women have generally assumed that they could help ensure the health of their children by being vigilant during pregnancy about what they eat and drink

and about exposure to x-rays, pesticides and other toxic chemicals. Such short-term prudence will certainly protect the unborn child from many kinds of permanent damage, including the devastating neurological effects of alcohol. But protecting the next generation from hormone disruption will require a much longer vigilance—over years and decades—because the dose reaching the womb depends not only on what the mother takes in during pregnancy but also on the persistent contaminants accumulated in body fat throughout her lifetime. ...[W]omen transfer this chemical store built up over decades to their children during gestation and during breast-feeding (Colburn 1997).

Given scientific evidence for the cumulative effect of pesticide exposure on human health in general and female health in particular, it is unrealistic to think that it is safe for a woman to work at least eight hours per day manipulating flowers on which up to fifty times the amount of pesticides allowed on foods have been applied (Holt 2000). It is reasonable to think that the future of these women, even after they are no longer employed in the flower industry, will be characterized by long term vulnerability.⁵

According to Palan and Palan (1999), women are not allowed to work for more than an average of 1.22 years on a flower plantation because their employers believe that they “may become pregnant (considering their highly fertile age), resulting in the obligation of granting 90 days' leave after birth and two hours per day during nine months for nursing.” According to national regulations, the company covers only 25% of the 90-day leave cost and the state social security system pays for the remainder.

In general, young women give the best of themselves in terms of physical strength, optimism, work commitment and creativity, elements vitally important for the optimal performance of a flower plantation, but in turn they do not receive anything beyond a minimal income for a limited period of time. Moreover, as several case studies indicate, once flower workers are dismissed, depending on their age, the opportunities for another

⁵ Dr. Carlos Donoso, from a Centro Medico in Latacunga, explained me that since flower plantations had been installed in the area, there was an increasing number of respiratory and toxicity illness.

job in the same industry are limited. As has been mentioned, this industry is not likely to keep women for more than 3 years, and avoids hiring workers beyond 25 years of age (Palan and Palan 1999), which could be interpreted as a strategy to avoid social security obligations as well as compensation for illnesses related to pesticide bioaccumulation in the female body.

The second type of female worker, the married woman, expresses a number of perceptions similar to those of single women regarding the work experience, but there are also sharp differences. As described in Chapters 2 and 4, women from rural areas tend to have certain roles within the family and society, which provide power and social recognition. At the time of their involvement in flower work, not all of these roles were functioning. Some of them were interrupted by changes in the household's economy. For example, women were active in the management of household income when the family lived by means of subsistence agriculture. But after this activity disappeared, and exclusively men provided income, women no longer played a role in income management.

By working on a flower plantation, Maria, who may be representative of married flower workers, could recover latent cultural family roles. She obtains an income and manages it for household subsistence. With a regular income she is able to reinforce her decision making potential, which was more or less respected by her husband while she was not an income-generator, and now is completely recovered. She can also express agency by defining what to do with her income.

The recovery of management agency puts Maria in a better position in the relationship with her husband who now sees her as a factor in solving income-related

problems in the household or in improving the concrete material situation of the family. For example, Maria and her husband decided to add two additional rooms to the family's house principally because both bring home a paycheck (Chapter 4).

In the personal realm, Maria has gained the conviction that, if necessary, she can provide for herself and her family. As in Teresa's case, she has achieved self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of agency through employment in the flower industry. This improves her life and makes her optimistic about the future.

Maria's gender relations seem to have been improved due to her employment experience. She manages her money and participates in the decision-making process regarding important aspects of family life. Her husband now is less likely to argue with her when he is drunk. All of this is a clear improvement.

As in the case of the single female worker, wage labor also provides for social participation, as unemployment does not. And at this point Maria, as a married woman, knows what it means to be a mere observer to the process of earning the family's livelihood. Of course, this does not mean that motherhood or labor in the subsistence economy constitute unemployment, but as stated in Chapter 2, unfortunately in the "real world" these activities are economically invisible, and therefore do not count in the struggle to survive in a capitalist system.

The strongest drawbacks of employment in the flower industry, in Maria's opinion, are due to the conflict it creates with her household roles, particularly childcare, which is important for her. Although Maria cannot adequately combine her roles as mother and worker, she thinks that the job's economic benefits represent an improvement in the well-being of the household and that it is therefore worth continuing with her job, although it

is evident that her husband does not share child care or basic household chores. These activities are Maria's tasks. This means that she is shouldering both reproduction and production roles, and is thus burdened with a double workload every day, which could be physically and psychologically devastating.

In the social realm, work in the flower industry appears to have had a negative impact on Maria. She cannot participate in community *mingas*, nor can her husband on occasion.⁶ This could weaken her social relations.

As in the case of single women, Maria is foregoing career opportunities by working in the flower industry. She cannot make realistic plans based on her job. For example, she cannot get loans that will need to be repaid beyond the average time that flower industry will keep her on as a worker because she will not be able to make payments beyond that time.

Although the flower industry provides basic training in writing skills and accounting in order that workers be able to provide data on production levels, Maria does not think that her job has been a source of new knowledge. She thinks that most of the things she does at work are tasks she learned at home, particularly in subsistence agriculture.

Overall, rural women employed on flower plantations are clearly not empowered by their jobs. What they obtain are some positive elements that are likely to disappear due to the lack of work stability. Since flower work does not offer stability or career opportunities, the two concrete gains of women workers, income and self-esteem, are menaced in the near future. And it is reasonable to suppose that a woman who loses her

⁶ The Comuna Mulauco fines families when a member does not show up for the *mingas*. The fines range from US\$3 for an ordinary *minga*, and US\$10 for a special *minga*. Interview with Patricio Collahuaso.

job is in a worse situation than she was before employment outside the home. This is especially true for those women who assume debts due to their belief that their income would be steady and long-term.

The situation of women working with NTAEs is thus not a means to empowerment, but to understanding the nature of structural adjustments. Thus, the involvement of rural women in the labor force could be described as an adaptive process to a new form of capitalist relations. The process of involving “non-productive” people in the production and consumption cycle could characterize this form of capitalism.

Family, Communal and Personal Gains/Looses of Women

To understand the gains or loses from flower employment, Figure 1 shows the interrelation between women and the three realms in which she is involved: family, community, and personal.

The involvement of single women (“W1”), Single Mother (“W2”), and married women (“W3”) in “flower work” produces different outcomes in the “family,” community,” and “women” realms.

Connected to the “women” realm there are two squares: the square above shows the gains of women; the dotted square below shows the elements of female empowerment that are not provided by flower work though unconsciously women could assume they are receiving them. “Family” and “women” realms have been divided in two aspects: economy and (family) relations; and psychological” and “physical” respectively.

With this division is shown, for example, that family could have a positive economic effect from flower work, but a negative effect in terms of interrelations in the flower family workers. With this explanation, it is possible to appreciate the following outcomes:

1. For single women, the outcomes of being a flower worker are positives for her in both household family economy and family relations. Her income helps her family and she improves family relations. The outcomes for “herself” also are positive. Since she does not have specific household chores, she is not duplicating the daily workload by working in the flower plantation. Then, physically the outcomes are positive. And psychologically, the outcomes are also positive because she improves her self-esteem and gets an income to satisfy personal needs. Like all women workers, single women lack career opportunities, stability, durable social networks, and knowledge. Due to such deficiency, a single female flower worker is likely to lose her job, and therefore chances of income in the near future and a decreasing her self-esteem. Although the single woman is not involved in community activities, because she is still living in her parent’s house, she loses the learning process of community affairs.

2. For married women the outcomes of being a flower worker are positive for her family in economic terms. Nevertheless, she worries about her children’s care because she thinks that her children lack not only good physical care, but also a mother’s affection. The outcomes for herself are positive in the psychological aspect except in the feelings about her children’s care. She assumes that caring for her children is her role. Therefore, Maria for example, gains self-esteem, but she fights against her feeling of guilt. Consequently, she lives a kind of dichotomy. In the physical domain, the married woman suffers the major loss because flower employment means an additional workload to the regular activities she does at home. Then, she has to face productive and reproductive activities totally. This double responsibility and the moral remorse of leaving her children while working are likely to affect woman’s health in terms of physical and psychological stress. In addition, hidden costs of flower employment for these women are also the lack of career opportunities, stability, durable social networks, and knowledge. These hidden costs could reverse the psychological gain they obtained. The outcomes for community relations are also negative because a married woman will prefer to work at home when she is not working in the flower plantation, instead of attending meetings and events in the community.

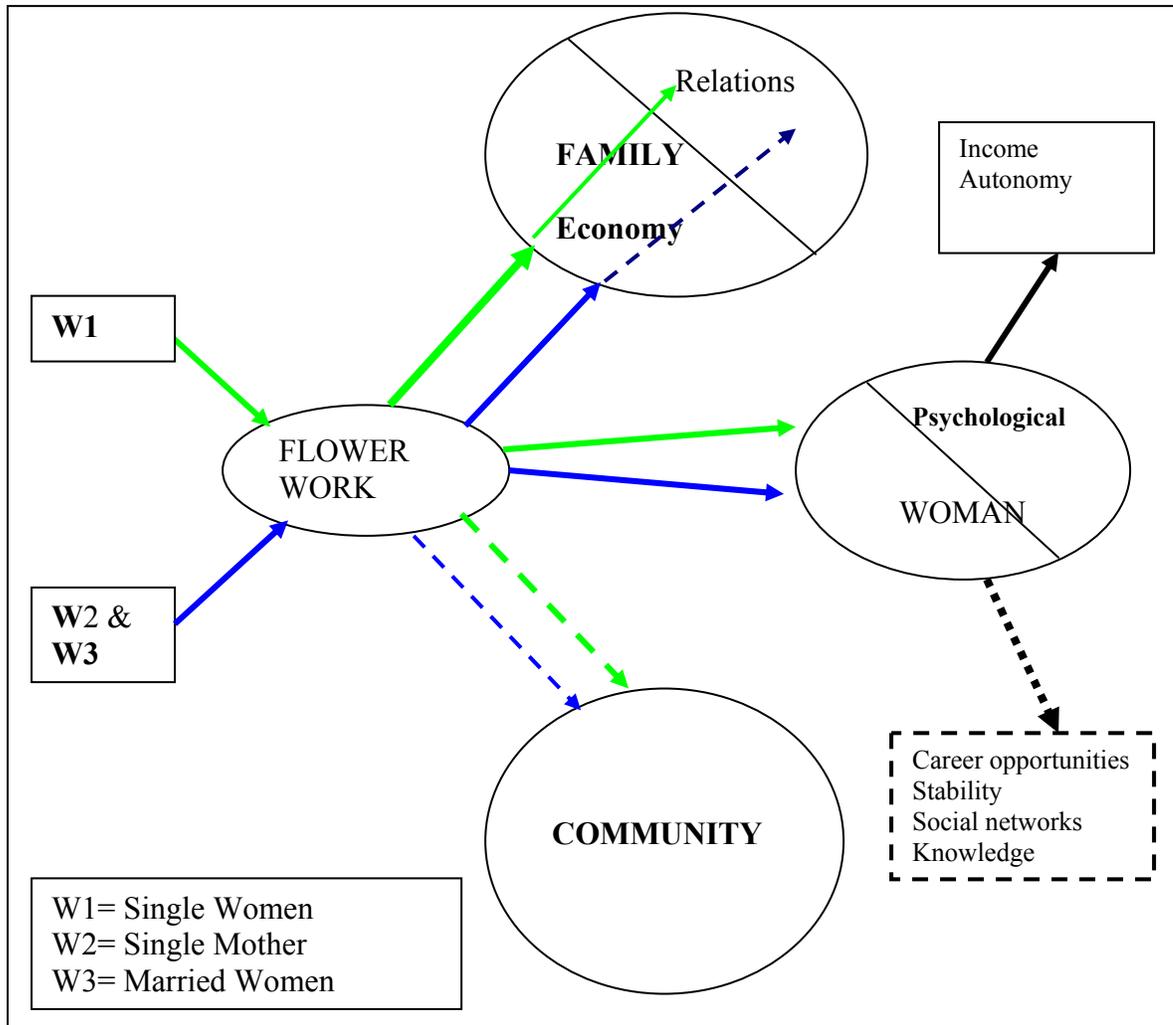


Figure 2. Family, communal, and personal gains/losses of women

3. For a single mother, the outcomes of being flower worker are positive for her family economy, but not necessarily for her family relations. She leaves her children under her parent's supervision while she is working. This, sooner or latter could cause some friction between the single mother and her parents due to the efforts they must make caring for the child. The outcomes for herself are positive in the psychological aspect, because she gains self-esteem and freedom. But physically, like the married woman, she loses because the flower employment means an additional workload to the regular activities she does at home. Although, a single mother receives support from her family in caring her baby she must compensate such help by doing some specific chores every day. As in the case of the married women, the double responsibility and moral remorse of leaving her children while she is working are likely to affect her health with physical and psychological stress. As in the previous cases, hidden costs of the employment for single mothers are also the lack of career opportunities, stability, durable social networks, and knowledge. These hidden costs could reverse the psychological gain they obtained. The outcomes for community relations are also negative because a

married woman will prefer to work at home and take care of her child while she is not working in the plantation, instead of attending meetings or social events in the community.

Finally, it is necessary to add the high risk of developing an illness due to pesticide exposure. It does not matter that the pesticide application is a male activity in the flower industry. The “chemical overload” process goes on while the worker is in an environment where pesticides have been applied. This could be a constant sword of Damocles over women’s health.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

The NTAEs and Women: a Link at Stake

Flower agribusiness has created great socioeconomic expectations in Ecuador, where this NTAE is one of the leading sources of national income. This new form of agricultural production appeared when subsistence agriculture was fading in highland Ecuadorian rural areas. The rise of NTAEs and the decline of subsistence agriculture are part of the same international process: the implementation of neoliberal policies and structural adjustment measures promoted by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These measures are in the context of economic globalization.

Globalization is a human phenomenon resulting from economic, technological, and methodological improvements that allow not only the exchange of commodities and ideas around the world, but also determine and target the best options for economic profit. Examples of these targets could be regions, ecosystems, countries, social groups, products. NTAEs have risen under this international logic market. The underlying reason for their appearance in given areas of the world are the advantages in terms of production costs and policies, which include land and labor prices, local regulations on labor, taxes, land tenure, and others that could secure businesses profits.

On the other hand, to achieve the needs of capital expansion it was necessary for the predominant economic system to disrupt “obsolete” or non-required forms of social organization. A subsistence agricultural system was seen as an obstacle, and therefore

not necessary for an international economic system based upon the structural adjustment policies.

Flower agribusiness in Ecuador was born in the shadow of national and international adjustment measures. Labor flexibilities that exempt employers from paying some social benefits to Ecuadorian workers, convenient currency exchange, and the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) enacted by the US government and aimed at providing duty-free treatment for some products imported from Andean countries, are among the structural advantages that determined the installation of this industry in Ecuador.

Like all the NTAEs, the preference for female labor is the main particularity of flower industry. This preference is not based on a social concern but on an element of profitability. After a decade of structural adjustments, Ecuadorian peasants could not maintain subsistence agriculture as the main source of household livelihood. The virtual bankruptcy of peasant economy during the 1980s forced rural people to sell their labor in the capitalist market. This is the background that explains the involvement of women in flower employment.

The relationship between NTAEs and women has raised an international discussion on the effects of paid work in women and gender and family relations. It has been said that the family is needed by the economic system to be both producer, and consumer (Chapter 4 and 5). Of course, this system needs the most efficient workers to fit the needed work. Since the main referent of efficiency in the capitalist system is cost, women become a target because they represent a less expensive labor option.

This thesis analyzes the effects of flower employment in women from the indigenous descendant *comuna* Mulauco, located near Quito, the Ecuadorian capital. Although *Comuna* Mulauco has been rapidly influenced by Ecuadorian mainstream culture, its members still retain some features of the Andean traditional culture background, particularly in gender relations (Chapter 2).

Through the vignettes of Teresa, Maria, and Zoila, are representative characters of the single, married, and single mother women flower workers interviewed for this thesis, I have explored the impacts that flower employment has produced upon women. I have considered three realms of impacts on women: personal, family, and community. I have used the “women’s empowerment” framework to establish the elements that could define a positive effect of employment on women. The elements to define women’s empowerment were determined as income, career opportunities, social networks, knowledge, stability, and social security.

Empowerment / Disempowerment

Income, career opportunities, social networks, knowledge, stability, and social security are among the elements that define empowerment in women in Mulauco’s reality. Through these elements women are more likely to overcome gender inequalities. As described below, based on the information gathered, not all of these elements are present in female flower employment relations. In some cases, these elements not only do not provide empowerment, but cause disempowerment. Moreover, women workers are additionally affected by flower employment, especially in terms of health, which could mean a permanent form of disempowerment for them.

Income

Income is the first element considered for women to attain employment. From the interviews I conducted among female flower workers, it is clear that by considering income only, in some way all of them feel that they are being (or have been) empowered by working in the flower plantation. Income allows women to recuperate their active role in the household's economy (Chapters 2 and 5), which was latent or invisible after the loss of subsistence agriculture. As seen in Chapters 5 and 6, all women workers in Mulauco control their own money. In some cases there is the custom of pooling of both spouses' income to make one household income. In this case, women are still active in controlling the part of the money that corresponds to their roles. No matter what their earnings may be, women see them as something they fight for and deserve. Traditionally women were an important part of the economic cycle of the household, and in such roles, they were shareholders in the production. With money earned from employment, women found themselves once again fulfilling such traditional roles. This is an important result of flower employment.

Income also bolsters some personal gains in women workers like self-esteem, visibility, and autonomy. These are important psychological elements that promote optimism in women and therefore could promote positive changes. The income obtained by women workers is also important for their families who are improving their well being, by providing food and other needed goods.

Stability, Career Opportunities and Experience

These three interconnected elements of female empowerment are absent within flower employment. Except for some qualified workers like accountants or agronomists,¹ the flower industry does not take permanent workers. As has been reported, the work timeframe average in flower industry is only 1.22 years (Chapter 6), and after that time workers are dismissed. Women workers fired could only find jobs again in other flower plantations for about two more times, provided that they are under the average age of 25 years old, which is another limit in the flower industry. In such a case, women could work about four years more as flower workers. After that, it is not likely for them to find a job any more in the flower industry and maybe in any kind of job.² In these conditions, it will be difficult to have career opportunities for women, and therefore, experience is irrelevant in such a short working period.

Without stability, career opportunities, or experience, the employment of women is an ephemeral improvement, after which women will reinforce their pessimistic views on gender relations.

Social Networks

Women workers gain a social network based in the flower industry, and weaken the traditional community based network. Although industry related social networks could offer better entrepreneurial options, they are not necessarily stable or trustworthy as community network. As Herrera (1999) and Korovkin (2000) concur, social participation of female workers is weakened in the community when they become flower

¹ For example, one of the interviewed people, Mr. Patricio Collahuaso, is an employee from Mulauco who has worked at a flower plantation since 13 years ago. He is a flower technician.

² According the World Fact Book 2003, unemployment in Ecuador is 7.7%, but underemployment is about 47%.

workers. The flower industry promotes new forms of social organization like sport clubs, and associations. Although those activities do not compete with traditional organizations, they promote a decline in the participation of flower workers. Other traditional institutions related to women's roles that have suffered the harsh effects of flower businesses' activities are the kinship-based communal organizations in which rural women have played an important role, providing and receiving support to solve family problems, exchanging advice, and offering moral encouragement when necessary. By working at flower plantations, women are giving up their participation in kinship related events, which Korovkin (2002) suggests causes a weakening of civil society and a deterioration of the quality of life in rural areas surrounding flower plantations.

Knowledge

The only knowledge that flower industry needs from female workers is the kind in which they are trained before becoming workers (basic mathematics, agriculture tasks, etc.). Beyond the knowledge that women bring to work, no significant knowledge is provided by the flower industry. Due to the character of flower employment, women do not acquire information or skills that could increase their chances of working in other types of employment.

Social Security

Regarding social security, female flower workers are in a vulnerable situation. Physical exhaustion and pesticide exposure, are among the negative elements of flower employment that could affect women's health.

Flower employment increases the daily workload women already have at home. After 8 hours of flower work, women must face the daily house chores from which they have not been released. As a consequence, there is an excessive effort, which could have

devastating effects on women's health. In addition, the prolonged exposure to a pesticide-saturated environment involves another negative effect of employment on women. Since they are manipulating flowers treated with high amounts of pesticides, there is a high risk of getting degenerative illness, even after they have left the flower work. In fact, there are reports about the high rate of morbidity due to pesticide exposure in other flower areas of Ecuador. It is common that women workers suffer from headache, excessive salivation, nausea, stomachache, weakness, excessive sweatiness, and other maladies that could be linked with pesticide exposure.

Another negative result of flower employment is the regret of mother workers with children. Since they cannot be in contact with their children for long hours every day, these children generally are not under any adult family care. This situation involves poor performance at school, bad nutrition, and other associated problems that are assumed by women as direct effects of their decision of get a job. This element encompasses a psychological burden for women workers.

Is Flower Employment an Illusion for Women?

Flower employment has instilled much hope for young Ecuadorian peasant women who expect to fulfill material needs and improve in personal terms through this work. As explained, the positive effect of employment on women is definitely income, which beyond fulfilling material needs, is relevant to improving women's self esteem, and providing some autonomy. In addition, income allows women workers to recuperate the traditional role of being active in household's economy, which is likely to improve also gender relations.

But unfortunately, these positive effects are transient, because women unavoidably can not keep the flower job after a few years. And at that time, they do not have enough

experience and knowledge to obtain other types of work in the labor market. NTAEs and the flower industry take the best period of women's lives, the time when they are physically strong, and therefore they are eager to be part of social production. But flower work does not provide an equivalent benefit to women. This work offers only an unrealistic sense of stability and well being that vanishes after few years.

Under the related circumstances it is worthwhile to ask if flower employment is an illusion for women. A possible response from any impartial observer could be positive, affirming that a disadvantageous job like flower employment is simply a mirage. But for the thousands of women workers that have rotated through flower industry for more than one decade, it was not a mirage. It was the only work option they could reach.

Employment as it previously had been,³ was a source not only of income, but also of career opportunities, social networks, knowledge, stability, and social security for workers. However flower agribusiness, the most successful non-traditional agricultural export industry of Ecuador, has systematically avoided providing other benefits than a limited income to women workers, who are its main work force. The failure by the flower industry in providing career opportunities for women reinforces the perception that women's activities are taken as irrelevant for development. Like similar international experiences analyzed by Charseworth & Wright (1991), women in flower agribusiness are found in the lowest status jobs, without career paths.

Beyond the local foci of this thesis, in a national-international view, it is evident that despite the enormous theoretical analysis of women's conditions, and the democratic and human rights protection trends, which are a common coin of all the international

³ The labor laws in Ecuador before the structural adjustments guaranteed stability, minimum wages, annual vacation and other rights to workers.

agendas (OAS, ONU, Summit of the Americas, Ibero-American Summit, and so on), women's well-being still remain largely ignored by development. It is ironic that after decades of social labor benefits tailored for (urban) workers (extra payments, vacations, education subsidies, etc.), the first massive experience of rural women's employment is bereft of sustained benefits.

It is ironic also that for peasant women, in the past decades when subsistence agriculture was the only household livelihood their situation was much better than today. Then, women enjoyed less distorted gender relations, since they were an effective part of their household management, and also they engaged in work, which was widely recognized socially and absolutely functional in their family. But now, in times of democracy and with better social and economic tools to determine the social, economic, and psychological situation of women around the globe, peasant women are being received in the world of development and modernization by this illusory work.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Since all the women involved in the flower industry stop their participation in waged work after at a certain limited time, it is important to analyze how these women face their future life; how they invent a new reality, and how in that new reality they weigh their short experience as flower workers. An anthropological study of the post-flower experience of peasant women could provide insights on adaptability and cultural resilience.

Another field of future studies could be in economic anthropology. Since periodically there are women that leave the economic circle of the flower industry, it is likely that most of these women will try to replace the wage they used to obtain from flower employment by involving in economic activities that could result in massive

regional, national and international migration. This process could have social, demographic, and economic impacts on peasant and indigenous communities.

A final remark pertains to the mental shift of flower workers from "traditional" to "modern" societies. When peasant women become involved in the labor market, they enter in a completely new reality from what they are used to. This new reality is "*modernization*," a style of life based on the need to produce, consume, accumulate, and exchange values, from which they cannot leave, and in which they must endure for the rest of their lives. Although peasant women after wage work are mentally immersed in this new reality, they cannot count wage work as the material element to sustain their lives in modernity, as a granted benefit of the system that forced them to leave their traditional reality. Therefore, the anthropological question here is how safe it is to dismantle subsistence economies that provide basic life needs to peasant people, to give them an illusory modernity?

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE TO INTERVIEW WOMEN FLOWER WORKERS

1. How long have you lived here?
2. Where did you come from and why did you move?
3. Does your nuclear family live separately or in close contact with your extended family?
4. How many children do you have? Would you like to have more children? Whose decision is it on the number of children?
5. Where do the children stay while you are working?
6. What was your work or activity before your employment in flower business?
7. What were your main reasons for going to work in flowers business?
 - a. Improve familiar earnings?
 - b. To gain personal freedom?
 - c. To feel more respected?
8. Have you changed since you became a flower worker?
9. How do you think your community sees you now that you are flower worker?
10. How do you get to work every day?
11. How many hours at day do you work in flowers and what do you do?
12. Could you briefly describe a typical workday?
13. Do you feel that you have learned something new by working in flowers?
14. After your experience as a flower worker do you consider you are better prepared to face your life?
15. If you or your family could obtain enough money would you leave your work in flowers? Then what would you like to do?
16. You (and your husband or family) have a farmland?
 - a. What do you grow?
 - b. Who cares for it?
 - c. How many hours are devoted to that?
 - d. Are the crops for your family consumption, for exchange or for market?
17. Do you have domestic animals? Who cares them and for how long every day?
18. Are the animals for your own consumption, for exchange or for market?
19. How are family relations in your home since you become a flower worker?
20. Who makes the main decisions in your home? You, your husband, both?
21. Do you think that the family is more involved in home issues since you are working in flowers?
22. Who takes the children to school or childcare?
23. Who helps the children in school homework?
24. Who cares for the children when they are at home?
25. Who buys the groceries and who decides what to buy?
26. What percentage of the household's budget represents your income?
27. Who pays medical and medicine bills?

28. Who buys the clothes?
29. Who decides to buy furniture or home appliances?
30. Who prepares the food? Does the laundry? Or cleans the home?
31. What does your husband think of your work?
32. Do you participate in women's or worker's organizations?
33. How has your life been the same since you work in the flower industry?

APPENDIX B
CUESTIONARIO PARA TRABAJADORAS DE FLORICULTORAS

1. Cuanto tiempo vives aqui?
2. De donde vienes y por que cambiaste tu domicilio?
3. Tu familia nuclear vive independientemente o allegada a tu familia de origen o de tu esposo?
4. Cuantos hijos (as) tienes? te gustaria tener mas ninios?
5. Donde pasan los ninios mientras tu estas en tu trabajo?
6. Que actividad tenias antes de trabajar en la floricultura?
7. Cuales fueron tus principales consideraciones para entrar a trabajar en flores:
 - Mejorar el ingreso familiar?
 - Tener independecia?
 - Sentirte revalorizada?
8. Como te ves a ti misma despues de haber empezado a laborar en la floricultura?
9. Como crees que tu comunidad te ve ahora que trabajas en la floricultura?
10. Como llegas hasta tu lugar de trabajo?
11. Cuantas horas al dia dedicas a tu trabajo floricola y que tareas realizas?
12. Podrias describir un dia de trabajo?
13. Sientes que has aprendido nuevas cosas en las floricultoras?
14. Te consideras con mejor preparacion para enfrentar la vida despues de tu experiencia laboral en flores?
15. Si tu o tu familia tuvieran dinero suficiente, dejarías el trabajo en la floricultura? Que te gustaria hacer entonces?
16. Tu (y tu esposo) mantienen una parcela de cultivos?
 - Que cultivan?
 - Quien la cuida?
 - Cuantas horas diarias?
 - Los cultivos son para consumo o para venderlos?
17. Tienen criadero de animales ? Quien los cuida y cuanto tiempo?
18. Los animales son para consumo o para la venta?
19. Como ves las relaciones en tu hogar desde que eres trabajadora? Las decisiones las toman tu y tu esposo o solamente el ?.
20. Quién hace las principales decisions en tu casa?. Tu?. Tu esposo?, los dos?.
21. Crees que hay mas participacion de tus ninios y de ustedes los padres, en los asuntos familiares?
22. Quien lleva a los ninios hasta la escuela o al lugar donde permanecen mientras tu trabajas?
23. Quien ayuda a los ninios en las tareas de la escuela?
24. Quien atiende a los ninios cuando estan en la casa?

25. Quien hace las compras de los viveres y quien decide que comprar?
26. Qué porcentaje del presupuesto familiar representa tu ingreso?
27. Quien hace los gastos de la atencion medica y las medicinas?
28. Quien compra la ropa?
29. Quien decide comprar los muebles o electrodomesticos como compraron el ultimo artefacto?
30. Quien cocina, lava la ropa y limpia la casa?
31. Que piensa tu esposo de tu trabajo?
32. Participas en organizaciones laborales femeninas?
- 33.** Cómo ha cambiado tu vida desde que empesaste a trabajar en las floricultoras?

APPENDIX C
LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

1. Teresa (single woman worker)
2. Paulina (single woman worker)
3. Emperatriz (single woman worker)
4. Maria (married woman worker)
5. Hilda (married woman worker)
6. Zoila (single mother woman worker)
7. Mercedes Postuña (former flower woman worker)
8. Luisa Tanguila (former flower woman worker)
9. Susana Quilumba (former flower woman worker)
10. Maria Ramona Dianacallo (former flower worker)
11. Jose Dianacallo (Maria's father)
12. R. de Dianacallo (Maria's mother).
13. 71 years old man. Father of a women flower worker)
14. 76 years old woman. Mother of a former flower women worker)
15. Tony Morales (Flower businessman)
16. Patricio Vasconez (Manager of *Floricultora Arco Iris*)
17. Agustin Baquero (Flower businessman - *Floricultora Arco Iris*)
18. Esperanza A. (Women at *Floricultora Arco Iris*)
19. Patricio Collahuaso (flower industry technician)
20. Dr. Carlos Donoso (Doctor at Medical Center in Latacunga).

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marcela Enriquez is an Ecuadorian lawyer (Universidad Central del Ecuador 1987) who worked in environmental and human rights issues since the mid 1980s. After personal experiences of motherhood raising her twins Samik and Misael, and reflections on the hidden work of women in social construction, she opted to study anthropology at the University of Florida.

Marcela Enriquez is co-founder of Corporación de Defensa de la Vida, CORDAVI, the first Ecuadorian environmental law firm in Ecuador, and Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, ELAW, an international liaison for environmental law practitioners.

As part of her environmental and human rights activities, Marcela Enriquez has sued oil companies and governmental organizations in defense of national parks and indigenous territories. She also has written several books and articles on these issues.