

THESIS

REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF THE WORKER COMMITTEE ON FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED FARMS IN THE ECUADORIAN CUT- FLOWER INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF THE WORKER COMMITTEE ON FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED FARMS IN THE ECUADORIAN CUT- FLOWER INDUSTRY

This thesis explores the effectiveness of the worker committee on fair trade certified flower plantations in Ecuador in an effort to identify the challenges and opportunities for fair trade in its goal to facilitate worker representation and empowerment on large-scale enterprises. Representation starts by giving workers an institutional mechanism through which they can join management in the discussion of fair working conditions. The worker committee serves as this mechanism on certified farms in Ecuador. Empowerment implies that workers have the power to instigate change in order to improve working conditions. Providing worker empowerment is problematic in this context due to the structural limitations of the worker committee. Nonetheless, the extent to which the worker committee can provide representation and communication between workers and management may serve as an important step in the process towards worker empowerment.

In order to understand the potential for representation on flower plantations, it is important to acknowledge that the flower industry and the actors involved are operating in a market that favors rationality and productivity. I employ Weber's notion of formal

rationality to help situate this discussion. Formal rationality is the governing force behind the rise of modern society and its institutions; including the modern global economy. Formal rationality allows for efficiency and calculability, but also leads to an impersonal world where the needs of individuals are sidestepped in order to create a system of productivity.

The goal of this study is to demonstrate how management's drive to rationalize production in order to survive in a competitive flower industry has the potential to both constrain and enable the process toward worker empowerment. For flower producers, the drive to differentiate makes certification an attractive option. Certified farms in turn, provide the institutional space for worker representation and communication with management. This paper argues that representation is a precondition for the type of empowerment that workers ultimately need, but does not assume that representation and empowerment are synonymous.

Specifically, this study looks at the potential benefits and limitations of the worker committee in its effort to facilitate representation and communication. It addresses two research questions. What are the rationalization processes that impact the lives of workers and managers? To what extent does the worker committee serve as a forum for communication between workers and managers to promote representation?

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ECUADORIAN CONTEXT

Ecuador's Sierra region is home to the country's flower industry. It is often referred to as the 'land of sleeping volcanoes' for its location in the heart of the Andes mountain range. Nestled at the base of snow-covered peaks and rolling green hills, many towns in these regions have grown substantially because of the flower industry. The industry's presence is hard to overlook when you travel along the Pan American highway and see large white greenhouses scattered across the countryside.

For peasant families, employment on flower farms is often the most attractive and viable option for work. Flower jobs allow people to stay in their communities, rather than migrating to other regions or countries in search of work. Moreover, many flower farms offer workers transportation to work, provide a subsidized lunch, pay minimum wages and offer probationary and one-year contracts that allow workers access to social security. As Korovkin (2005) points out, none of these benefits are flawless, but the flower boom has put an end to the process of outmigration in flower-growing cantons and triggered an inflow of migrants from other parts of the country.

The history of social dynamics and land ownership in the Andean region has made it particularly conducive to the rise of an agro-export industry reliant on a large pool of cheap wage labor. Under the traditional hacienda system Spanish and Mestizo elites owned the most fertile and productive land located in the valley floors, which they dedicated to large plantation-style farms called haciendas. Hacienda production

depended on the labor of landless peasants. In exchange for their labor, peasants received small plots of less desirable land in the hills and mountains (Hanratty 1991).

In the 1960s, land reform legislation attempted to redistribute land more fairly by eliminating small plots and dismantling the hacienda system. However, the reform did little to change land distribution. By the mid-1970s land ownership looked nearly the same as it had in the 1950s (Hanratty 1991).

To this day, elites still occupy most of the desirable land in the valley floors but it is large flower plantations that have replaced hacienda production. The hills and mountainsides resemble a patchwork quilt of different shades of greens and yellows that mark individual peasant families' tilled plot of land – plots that get smaller as they are divided and passed along to each successive generation. With very limited opportunities for employment in this region, most peasants rely on family agriculture for part of their income, balanced by migratory work, petty trade and crafts (Hentshel and Waters 2002). Rural poverty remains a significant problem, with nearly 75% of the population living below the poverty line at the turn of the century (SIISE 2000).

In flower growing provinces, new non-farm businesses have flourished by providing the inputs; such as paper, plastic, and lumber to floriculture farms. Additionally, stores selling dvds, modern entertainment and technology have become a common sight (Pálan and Pálan 1999). During my time in local communities, I noticed advertisements for agro-chemicals, irrigation systems and greenhouses plastered on businesses throughout town. Every year the town of Cayambe throws a giant festival to celebrate the importance of flowers in the region – the entire town comes to the streets for a giant parade and at many farms, workers are given a half day off to partake in the

festivities. I was invited to join the workers from one of the farms who had organized a dance and decorated a float to represent their farm for the parade.

The flower industry has transformed the modes of consumption and lifestyle in what were once provincial towns, improving access to modern amenities, as well as bolstering local economies and infrastructure. New homes are now being constructed with cement and processed materials, whereas before they often had thatched roofs and adobe walls (Vexler 2006). The majority of houses have electricity, water and typically a dirt road leading to them (Schoenfeld and Juarbe 2005). While these changes are also a byproduct of international emigration and remittance receiving, the flower industry has certainly played an important role.

Flower workers are representative of an ethnically diverse population in the Ecuadorian highlands, comprised of multiple indigenous groups, mestizos (mix of Indigenous and European) and Afro-Ecuadorians. Ecuador has a politically and socially charged history of race relations in the Andean region. The indigenous community is estimated to range from 30-38% of the population, and although it has dealt with years of oppression and discrimination at the hands of Mestizo and European elites, it also has mobilized what many scholars consider the strongest and most politically effective indigenous social movement organizations in Latin America, la Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador, known by its acronym CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nations in Ecuador) (Macdonald 2002; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005).

Over the last 20 years, the indigenous social movement in Ecuador has successfully challenged and re-shaped the practice of politics and the structure of the political system in the nation (Andolina 2003; Peralta, Santillana Ortiz, and Arboleda

2008; Yashar 2005; Zamosc 1994). At one point during my fieldwork, I was unable to get to my research site in Latacunga for several days because the indigenous groups had organized a roadblock that had dismantled highways throughout the country. Indigenous communities across Ecuador marched from their respective regions to the Capital building in Quito to protest a new water bill that threatened their land rights. In my discussions with flower workers, many people noted that the flower industry was different than other forms of employment because it did not discriminate based on race.

The flower industry has become an integral part of peasant and indigenous communities in the Sierra region of Ecuador. Rural employment has grown alongside the booming growth of the industry; during the 1980s and 1990s flower companies created nearly 50,000 year-round jobs (BCE 2002). In Korovkin's (2003) interviews with flower plantation workers in the indigenous communities in the Sierra region of Ecuador, it was generally agreed that the cut-flower industry provided better paying jobs compared to other forms of off-farm employment in the area. However, wages in the flower industry were not enough to cover basic subsistence needs.

Gender is another important social category in flower production. The cut-flower industry preferences female employees, a trend that is consistent with the nature of export-oriented industries. In part, this preference stems from the thought that women take better care of delicate flowers – scholars also note this preference can be explained by women's position in a patriarchal social order where they are less likely to challenge male supervisors or join trade unions (Thrupp 1995; Warnock 1995).

While the flower industry is an important source of employment in the rural highlands of Ecuador, it also has a notorious history of negative social and environmental

consequences for workers and surrounding communities. Furthermore, rural trade unionism in Ecuador is virtually nonexistent (Anderson 1997; Vos 2000). Labor organizing in Ecuador has been stifled by elites, particularly those in the agro-export sector in the rural highlands (Frank 2005). Human Rights reports in 2010 cited Ecuador for high levels of violence and threats towards union leaders as well as dismissing and blacklisting union members (USDS2010).

In response to international scrutiny and community outcry, the flower industry has made significant strides to improve its image and practices over the years. In the last decade a new wave of ethical certifications and codes of conduct have been introduced to help regulate social and environmental standards alongside a recently passed national labor legislation.

This thesis draws from fieldwork conducted on four flower plantations in Ecuador that have obtained fair trade certification. This study is grounded in the social and historical context that makes the Ecuadorian flower industry unique and seeks to understand from the perspective of workers and managers the impact of fair trade certification. Specifically, it looks at one institutional mechanism within fair trade certified farms: the democratically elected worker committee. In the absence of trade unions, the worker committee is designed to provide workers a mechanism through which they can communicate with management and take part in the discussion of fair working conditions (Raynolds and Long 2007).

To understand the worker committee's potential, it is important to situate this study in the broader context of the flower industry and its role in a capitalist global market. For flower producers there is constant pressure to rationalize production by

cutting costs and increasing productivity. This study explores how this pressure both constrains and enables worker representation on fair trade farms. Two research questions guide this discussion: What are the rationalization processes that impact the lives of workers and managers? To what extent does the worker committee serve as a forum for communication between workers and managers to promote representation? The following overview will provide a roadmap for how these questions will be explored.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter two is rooted in Weber's notion of formal rationality as a building block for modern society. Formal rationality underpins the rise of modern institutions, such as bureaucracies and the economy, and sets the parameters for individual choice. Building from this notion of rationality, the discussion is broadened to a global scale. It explores how specific political and economic decisions have laid the framework for a new form of modern globalization that redefines spatial boundaries. Nation-states have been encouraged to adopt neoliberal strategies to open their borders to foreign investment and make adjustments to attract multinational corporations. With this process, the production of goods has been extended to include people and locations across the globe. This reorganization process rewards production sites with the most flexible and precarious workforce, contributing to a global deterioration of labor conditions.

It is in this context that new forms of transnational governance have begun to take shape. Fair trade certification is one such form – its goal being to improve the lives of workers at the bottom of the commodity chain, particularly by offering workers a voice in the discussion of fair working conditions. Building from partnership literature from the

UK, this discussion seeks to unravel how worker committees on fair trade certified farms serve to facilitate dialogue, communication and representation.

Chapter three narrows the discussion to the Ecuadorian flower industry. It discusses the historical conditions that made Ecuador an attractive location for export-led development. Designed as a development strategy to provide jobs, the flower industry was an immediate economic success. Its presence has been transformative to rural communities; providing much needed jobs, but also restructuring the social fabric of rural civil society, particularly for its predominantly female workforce. A global value chain analysis is employed to explore the interactions between various nodes within the chain of global flower production. Since flowers are a highly perishable product, the value chain demands tight control and highly efficient transportation arrangements. For flower growers in Ecuador, there is constant pressure to produce, compete and differentiate. Survival in a rational marketplace has traditionally meant cutting costs and demanding higher levels of productivity.

Flower plantations have a notorious history for workers' rights violations and environmental abuses; practices that have gone unregulated for many years, due to weakened government institutions. However, in recent years new regulatory mechanisms have emerged in the form of ethical certifications and codes of conduct. Fair trade certification is explored in depth for its unique benefits to workers; such as the social premium to invest in community projects and the worker committees to promote worker representation, through increased dialogue and partnership among workers and management. Through the worker committees, fair trade certified flower plantations

provide a mechanism through which workers can voice their grievances and join in the discussion of improved working conditions

Chapter four discusses the methodology employed in this study. First I explain my role in the setting as a researcher and the challenges I faced as an outsider attempting to understand the lives of flower workers in rural communities. A brief description is offered of the work I did as a research assistant for a National Science Foundation (NSF) funded project – an assignment that I completed alongside the data collection for this thesis project. It is noted that the NSF project provided me access to research sites and a more holistic picture of the flower industry, but that my thesis project allowed me to go in different areas with participants and to a deeper level in some instances. Using a grounded theory approach, my research project emerged throughout the process of data collection and analysis as I sought to let participants guide the flow and depth of interviews. I conclude with a discussion of some research issues and challenges I encountered during my fieldwork experience.

Chapter five is an outline of my research findings. Both the management and worker perspective is provided to help illustrate the many factors that influence the worker committee's ability to promote partnership, communication and representation. From a management perspective, survival in a competitive marketplace is an ongoing challenge that requires high levels of productivity. As a fair trade certified flower plantation, management's greatest challenge is finding a way to balance a successful company, comply with the rigorous demands of certification and keep workers happy. For workers, the nature of work in the flower industry requires long hours away from family, occupational health risks and a high-pressure work environment. Fair trade offers

many benefits through the social premium and a chance for representation through the worker committee. For both management and workers, finding a way to make the committee work effectively requires time, trust and a willingness to negotiate. For workers, representation is possible when certain conditions are met, such as the ability to negotiate, a positive relationship with management and the belief in fair trade's authenticity. While these conditions are interrelated, when all are present workers express a sense of representation and a belief in the power of the worker committee.

The final chapter provides a discussion of findings and suggestions for further research. The conditions needed for an effective worker committee greatly depend on management's willingness to negotiate and cooperate with workers' requests. A positive relationship between workers and management is key. However, there seems to be a distinct difference between regular workers and committee members in the way they experience representation and empowerment. While regular workers are quicker to adopt an "us versus them" mentality and become disenchanted when problems emerge, committee members seem more invested in making the process work and confident in their ability to communicate with management on certain issues. It seems that committee members have gained a different understanding of the challenges management face in seeking partnership, and ultimately they align themselves with the well-being of the farm and maintaining certification. Further research is needed to understand the different experiences of regular workers and committee members, as well as an exploration of the structural components that influence work environments.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is theoretically based in Weber's notion of formal rationality as a guiding force behind modern society. It builds on Ritzer's (1996) application of Weberian rationality as an illustration of the modern bureaucracy, exemplified by the fast-food industry. The discussion is broadened to a global scale where the notion of rationality and modern bureaucracies help us understand the political and economic decisions that underpin the rise of neoliberal globalization. As spatial boundaries are reorganized, the production of goods has been extended to include people and locations across the globe, rewarding production sites with the most flexible and precarious workforce and contributing to a global deterioration of labor conditions. This process has accompanied the reconfiguration of the state and its role in labor-capital negotiations. It is in this context that new forms of transnational governance have begun to take shape, attempting to make visible the labor that goes into the production of goods. This thesis focuses specifically on one such form: fair trade certification. It explores fair trade's ability to promote representation and partnership through the worker committee.

WEBER AND THE LOGIC OF RATIONALITY

Weber's work is focused primarily on the process of rationalization (Brubaker 1984; Kalberg 1980). Weber was fascinated by his observation that the modern Western world was becoming increasingly more rational and sought to understand the factors that

contributed to this process in the West, but prevented it in other parts of the world (Ritzer 1983). In his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber illustrates an early connection between rationality and religious beliefs, particularly for certain denominations of Protestants, namely Calvinists. Rationality is first used as a means to connect economic gain with salvation, but over time rationality comes to replace religion in modern society.

For Weber, rationality is the driving force behind the establishment of the state, bureaucracy and the economy. Rationality permeates all aspects of modern society, allowing for complex social life and the natural world to become calculable, efficient and predictable. From this perspective, the move towards rationality has accompanied the processes of modernity and marks a distinct shift from traditional society. As Brubaker (1984:23-24) explains:

The calculative rationality so firmly entrenched in the modern economic and political order is not the product of slow and steady extension in the scope of calculation, self-interested action. Instead, the development of modern rational capitalism required a radical breakthrough in the domain of attitudes and dispositions – a breakthrough that Weber attributes to the religious ideas of the Reformation.

It is *formal rationality* that makes the modern Western social order unique (Brubaker 1984). Habermas and McCarthy (1985:xix) explain this as a “purposive or means/ends rationality” where actors make choices based on self-interest – their goal to control the world around them. An actor’s choice, however, is bound by over-arching rules and regulations that are mediated by large institutions, such as bureaucracies and the economy (Ritzer 2000). In his work *Economy and Society*, Weber describes bureaucracy as the institutional expression of rationality, governed by written rules, a distinct division of labor and a formal structure of domination.

A fully developed bureaucracy is objective and indestructible. Its powerful influence is inevitable in modern society, as it seeps through to every aspect of life (Giddens 1971:184). As Seidman (2004:50) explains, it is “bureaucracy’s spirit of impersonality and professionalism” that makes it the most powerful and efficient form of administration. In Weber’s view, rationalized bureaucracy is the most effective form of organization; it makes people cogs in the wheel of a rationalized and bureaucratized, efficient system with increasingly more rules and structure.

Today, the fast-food restaurant exemplifies rational bureaucracy; and the success of the fast-food industry is indicative of the powerful role formal rationality plays in modern society (Luxenberg 1985; Ritzer 1983; Ritzer 1996). In his work *The McDonaldization of Society*, George Ritzer (1996) illustrates how McDonaldized institutions represent Weber’s process of rationality and are emblematic of a modern bureaucracy. This section builds from Ritzer’s argument, highlighting the pull towards rational bureaucracy, characterized by efficiency, calculability, predictability and control.

For consumers, McDonald’s provides the most efficient means of satisfying their hunger by allowing them to get their meal inexpensively and quickly, without even having to leave the comfort of their car (Ritzer 1996). For workers, McDonald’s trains them to follow a specific model of how to prepare and deliver a meal as quickly and efficiently as possible. McDonald’s also provides workers and consumers with calculability; so that the amount of time it takes to consume a meal, the cost and amount of food provided in the meal is quantifiable. With this model, quantity is given preference over quality. We assume that “a lot of something, or the quick delivery of it, means it must be good” (Ritzer 1996:13). Workers’ jobs are also quantitative – the focus

being on how fast, for example, one can prepare the same exact cheeseburger over and over again.

Additionally, McDonaldized institutions provide predictability: consumers know exactly what to expect from their Big Mac and French Fries – there is no variation in shape or taste. McDonald's has been successful, in part because it “offers no surprises” and consumers have come to crave a predictable experience (Ritzer 1996:14). Workers are also trained to behave in a predictable way. Their interaction with customers is scripted – behavior is monitored by supervisors and expected to follow corporate rule. Their performance and behavior is highly controlled. McDonald's further controls employees by the threat of replacing them with non-human technology and machines.

McDonaldized organizations are able to effectively control their consumers as well by creating an environment and an experience that encourages a quick meal. Lines, easy and predictable menus, uncomfortable chairs and a drive-through window are examples of how a McDonaldized experience has become quick and efficient (Ritzer 1996:12-15).

Negative Consequences of Rational Management

There are costs of living in a McDonaldized society. The irony of a rationalized system is that it involves many negative consequences, or irrationalities. For example, Weber identifies the loss of enchantment as a negative consequence, or irrational result of a rational world order. To create an efficient and productive world that is based on impersonal rationality, we sacrifice all that is magical, emotional and unpredictable. Collins (1986:22) says that in this process social and economic life is made “methodical

and predictable, reducing all areas of production and distribution as much as possible to routine.”

For Weber, one of the negative consequences of bureaucratization is that only a select few have power and control. The majority of individuals are rendered powerless, trapped in an iron cage, without the means to control the institutions that govern their lives. The individual bureaucrat is a “only a small cog in a ceaselessly moving mechanism which ascribes to him an essentially fixed route of march” (Weber 1968:988).

The mystery of life, brotherly love, tradition and emotion are replaced by cold and impersonal “rational pursuit of interests” (Habermas and McCarthy 1985:xvii). As Giddens (1971:184) explains, this process of rational bureaucratization of the social world strips us of “individual creativity and autonomy of action.” Once a bureaucracy is in place it becomes a cycle of rationality and control – an irreversible and indestructible force, rendering individuals “dependent and powerless” (Seidman 2004:50).

Another result of rationalized systems is that often times they are inefficient. Or rather, efficiency is reserved for certain actors in the system. For the consumer, rationalized systems are often inefficient. For example, loading the family into the car and driving 20 minutes to eat at McDonald’s may actually be more time-consuming and expensive than preparing a meal at home. Similarly, walking down aisles and aisles of products in search of a specific product such as milk may be less efficient and time-consuming than buying it from the corner store near one’s home (Ritzer 1996).

For workers, efficiency is exerted down the chain of command and expressed in a series of pre-scripted regulations that they must follow. Workers are at the bottom of the

hierarchy, operating on the factory floor or in the assembly line position. They are cogs in a well-oiled machine and trained to follow corporate rules of efficiency.

On the contrary, for corporate owners who reside at the top of the hierarchy, their job is characterized by freedom and flexibility. They express their creativity by designing more efficient, cost-cutting strategies to increase their profit; such as replacing employees with machines or imposing quotas for assembly line workers to reach (Ritzer 1996).

Efficiency in rationalized systems means productivity and work for those at the bottom of the hierarchy, translating to more profit for those at the top (Ritzer 1996). Rational systems characteristically include underpaid, low-skilled workers. In a system where choice is based on value-free, formal rationality, unquantifiable things such as humanity and the environment are not part of the equation.

Ritzer (1996) describes the dehumanized and impersonal system that is embodied by McDonald's. In terms of environmental impact, the large-scale hog and cattle farms that feed the McDonald's machine produce exorbitant amounts of manure and waste that seep into the water supply, resulting in negative health effects on animals and humans alike. Mass production required to meet the demand for burgers and fries is part of an industrialized food system that increasingly relies on monocultures and mechanization. The industrialization of food production has greatly damaged soils and plant biodiversity, and has created agro-ecosystems that depend on high inputs of chemicals (Altieri and Rosset 1995). The agro food system is underpinned by a series of policies and decisions that preference an efficient system of increasingly high yields of corn, meat products and

potatoes. In the long run, however this system proves to be irrational and unsustainable for its catastrophic consequences to the environment.

Depersonalization

Weber warns that alongside the development of an objective bureaucracy, comes the dehumanization of society. Human beings absorb many of the costs associated with rational and productive systems like McDonald's. First, the food itself is high in saturated fat, cholesterol and sugars, with very little nutritional value – persuasive media campaigns target young children and get them hooked on this type of food for life. The nature of work at a fast-food restaurant, as Ritzer (1996) points out, is characterized as low-skill, unchallenging, monotonous and disenchanting. Workers are discouraged from being creative – their interaction with customers is brief and inauthentic. Due to the high rate of labor turnover, workers are unable to establish long-lasting, meaningful relationships with co-workers, making their work environment dissatisfying and impersonal.

For those who butcher the animals to provide customers their cheeseburgers, work is physically very demanding and dangerous. The majority of workers in the meatpacking industry are illegal immigrants who lack the voice and power necessary to oppose the terrible working conditions. The injury and death rates in this industry are extremely high – product of the nature of work where animals are pushed through an assembly line fashion to be butchered. Workers are expected to move quickly with sharp knives, often standing in puddles of blood. The work is difficult, repetitive and inhumane.

The nature of work is based on Ford's assembly line model where workers become more like machines – this system, as Ritzer explains “dehumanizes life on a day to day basis” (Ritzer 1996:150).

For Weber, a symptom of modern capitalism is this dehumanizing nature of bureaucratic life. Formal rationality paves the way for productivity and progress to the extent that “decisions are arrived at without regard to persons” (Kalberg 1980:1159).

The logic of formal rationality underpins the success of modern bureaucracy. On a broader scale, rationality is embedded in the processes and structures that govern the global economy. Building on Weber's theory, the next section explores how this logic is the guiding force behind modern capitalism and globalization.

RATIONALITY ON A GLOBAL SCALE

Formal rationality is a useful concept for understanding the changes in international rules and policies that have accompanied neoliberal globalization. As Lind (Lind 2005:19) argues, the era of modern globalization is grounded in historical processes that are rooted in a “specific set of policies and beliefs concerning the market.” The ideology guiding these policies is based on a value-free, market-based approach to world relations – the assumption being that economic liberalization is the most rational and beneficial global strategy for all actors involved. While Weber might argue that these processes are inevitable and irreversible in a capitalistic system, it is important to consider the specific decisions that preceded their development.

Steger (2009:38) describes the shift towards contemporary globalization as a “gradual emergence of a new international economic order,” set into motion towards the end of World War II with the Bretton Woods economic conference. Bretton Woods

accomplished several tasks that set the stage for modern globalization, including: a new focus on the expansion of international trade and a more stable global money exchange system linked to a fixed gold value of the US dollar. Additionally, this conference opened the door for the establishment of new international economic organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

At this conference, certain key political actors encouraged nation-states to define the “permeability of their borders”, allowing them to design their own political and economic policies (Steger 2009:39). The era following the Bretton Woods conference became defined by Keynesianism economics and controlled capitalism. Nation-states had autonomy to navigate money flows in and out of their borders, they implemented high taxation rates on corporations and the wealthy, all while expanding the welfare state (Steger 2009:39).

In the early 1970s the Bretton Woods system collapsed, making way for a new economic order that would help shift the trajectory of modern globalization by expanding free markets throughout the world. Led by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and U.S. President Ronald Reagan, the new economic order was set into motion by explicit political decisions focused on undermining the Keynesian welfare state. Alongside these shifts, world markets became liberalized, less stable and increasingly volatile (Steger 2009).

Thatcher and Reagan embodied a neoliberal ideology on the world stage. They promoted a myriad of economic principles rooted in a Weberian type of rationality to remove all barriers for capitalist bureaucracies. These principles included: less

government spending and involvement, expanding free markets throughout the world by eliminating import tariffs, privatization and de-regulation (Steger 2009). The dominance of the neoliberal worldview from the late 1970s up to the present day has created a world where public policy in the Global South is heavily influenced by the demands of international bureaucratic financial institutions. These bureaucracies control society with their rational, market-based prescriptions and foster economic growth by attracting foreign-direct investment by multinational corporate enterprises. In this policy approach “national governments (are simply) flexible transmission belts for global market forces” (Held and McGrew 2007).

Emergence of Buyer-Driven Chains

It is in this context that the production of goods has been extended across the globe, to take advantage of “diminishing spatial barriers” (Harvey 1989:84) to increase productivity and efficiency. Geographic boundaries have become more permeable, making room for global capitalism to move freely across national borders, allowing transnational capitalists to continuously shift their production sites, searching for the least stringent labor and environmental regulations (Harvey 1989:80). Out-sourcing and sub-contracting to the Third World have become common practices in the age of neoliberalism, changing the nature of production. Today, the chain of production involves multiple actors and locales.

One way to conceptualize this shift is through global commodity chain analysis (GCC) developed by Gereffi (1994). This framework includes a two part model – Buyer driven vs. Producer-driven - where the type of chain shapes who has more power in the chain. Through his “buyer-driven commodity chain”, Gereffi (1994) outlines how

retailers, brand-name companies and marketers dominate geographically dispersed systems of production and distribution processes. Later, using a global value chain (GVC) approach, Gereffi, Humphrey and Sturgeon (2005) explore the same links between production, distribution and consumption, but elaborate on the interconnected network of activities and actors that embody this chain.

Commodity chains are useful in this discussion as we analyze the role for various nodes along the chain and the impact different actors have on one another. Gereffi (1994:116) outlines how big buyers in the Global Commodity Chain have the power to:

simultaneously lower the prices they are paying for goods and dictate more stringent performance standards for their vendor (i.e. more buying seasons, faster delivery times, and better quality) in order to increase profit. The pressure to meet the buyer's demands is exerted down the chain to producers and their workers. Success requires finding new ways to cut costs to increase production and efficiency.

To paraphrase Castells (1996:79), in this world of global capitalism labor loses its collective identity and ability to organize. Producers, workers, managers and owners become blurred in a production system that relies on outsourcing and subcontracting across the globe. As Castells (1996:80) explains, modern globalization and its new configuration of space and time make it possible for the capitalist network to disconnect from subordinate groups and devalued places so that as consumers we are far-removed socially from the individual experience of a factory worker producing our clothes. The impact is that:

Infinite social distance is created between this meta-network and most individuals, activities, and locales around the world. Not that people, locales, or activities disappear. But their structural meaning does, subsumed by the unseen logic of the meta-network where value is produced, cultural codes are created, and power is decided.

In a global market governed by rationality, we are left with a “fundamental opposition between the bare logic of capital flows and the cultural values of human experience” (Castells 1996:80).

Many researchers using a GVC approach acknowledge the disjuncture between market place rationality and human experience, and use this framework to address global inequalities. Typically these discussions link development to increased participation in global value chains. These strategies focus on upgrading or increasing the range of activities carried out by producing countries as a way to level the playing field (Kaplinsky 2000; Ponte and Gibbon 2005). Some discussions focus on the implications and benefits for producers, without mention of the impact for workers at the bottom of the chain. The interest of this analysis however, is in the literature that examines the impact on workers.

Flexibilization and Feminization of the Labor Force

As Hale and Opondo (2005:302) assert:

Development means not only increasing the GNP of poor countries but also improving the quality of life for poor people, whose availability as a cheap labour force is one of the key reasons for the relocation of production.

Although the relocation of labor-intensive industries has created employment in developing countries, these jobs have been defined as precarious in nature, linked to the overall “feminization” of labor. Guy Standing (1999) explains the process of feminization as a trend toward insecurity and low pay that traditionally characterized women’s wage work, as well as women’s unstable position in the patriarchal social order. This description is used to explain the transformation of the formal labor market in developing countries, and as Standing argues is meant to describe the “weakening

position of men rather than any dramatic improvement in the occupational opportunities of women” (Standing 1999:600).

The deterioration of labor can be linked to neoliberal policies adopted by poor countries as a means to alleviate debt and widespread poverty. In order to receive loans from international organizations, poor countries were required to make a series of structural adjustments to their economic and social strategies. Large international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank provided these loans through development programs. In sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the ex-Soviet territories these development projects required nation-states to make neoliberal modifications which included welfare restrictions, minimal regulation of private capital flows, deregulation of labor markets and to “be governed by political and economic necessity rather than by public design” (Held and McGrew 2007:17).

For indebted peripheral countries, structural adjustment policies were imposed by multilateral agencies as a set of major social, political and economic transformations (Hoogvelt 2001). The promise was that alongside economic integration, through the reduction of tariff and nontariff barriers to trade, would come significant economic growth and eventually poverty reduction (Rodrik 1997:307). Governments throughout Latin America abandoned import-substitution industrialization (ISI) for export-led development strategies and re-structured their economies to attract foreign capital (Hoogvelt 2001) and buyer-driven commodity chains. They eliminated social spending programs, dismantled local and state bureaucracies and privatized state-owned industries and services such as petroleum companies, public transportation and pensions.

Many governments changed labor codes in an effort to eliminate “rigidities” (Cook 2007:32) or inefficiencies. This meant removing extra spending on labor, such as any prohibitions on temporary and part-time contracts, requirements to pay benefits, and costly severance packages. This practice made the nature of work more “flexible”, allowing management to lower labor costs through wage cuts, layoffs and the suppression of trade unions (Cook 2007).

These neoliberal adjustments included top-down policy prescriptions to utilize the existing sources of social vulnerabilities (i.e. gender, ethnicity, class) to locate cheap labor. Advocates of neoliberal reforms maintained that the old “rigid” labor policies were preventing the most vulnerable groups, such as women, young people and ethnic minorities, from access to formal employment, furthering economic inequalities (Cook 2007). The impact of neoliberal adjustments to labor, however, meant the dismantling of stable, unionized, permanent jobs that accompanied the ISI period. The jobs that emerged in their wake were characterized by insecurity, low pay and temporary contracts (Atal, Ñopo, and Winder 2009).

Sanmiguel-Valderrama (2007) illustrates the complexity behind the changing nature of labor through her discussion of the flower industry in Colombia. To summarize her discussion, trade liberalization has been nuanced and uneven in its impact, exemplified in the rise of export-oriented industries. On one hand, the Colombian flower industry has provided men and women access to much needed wage-labor. However, the jobs created by this industry are not only “feminized” in nature, but also “racialized”; meaning that the lowest ranking positions are filled by women and men from peasant, indigenous and mestizo backgrounds. In contrast, upper-level and management positions

that are characterized by higher pay, more stability and better conditions are occupied by middle or upper-class men and women from European or mestizo descent. As Sanmiguel-Valderrama (2007) argues, it is impossible to generalize the nuanced impact of trade liberalization for different groups. However, the jobs created for those who reside at the bottom of the social ladder are “short-term, unstable, and precarious” in their conditions (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007:73).

Arguably, even low-quality jobs are better than no jobs for regions plagued by widespread poverty. The idea is that employment includes economic growth, eventually leading to better wages and higher labor conditions (Ghose 2000; Gunter and van der Hoven 2004). However, in terms of better wages, Kucera (2002) argues that increasing the cost of labor for export-industries could actually lead to an end in foreign investment. As far as the economy is concerned, Weeks (1999) explains that the benefits stemming from economic growth depend on the balance of power between capital and labor. In the era of globalization, the power of labor has deteriorated alongside the increased mobility of capital, making widespread and distributional growth problematic (Weeks 1999).

Reconfiguration of the State: New Players in Labor-Capital Negotiations

Another important trend that accompanied neoliberal adjustments was the reconfiguration of the state so that old policies designed to protect labor were replaced by new policies favoring multinational corporations. For example, in Latin America work in rural and urban informal sectors has always been characterized as precarious and flexible. But in the 1980s and 1990s, alongside neoliberal reform, labor legislation further weakened organized labor through a set of legal policies that included the dismantling of

government agencies and cuts in public spending (Bronstein 1997; Gwynne and Kay 2000).

In the past decade Latin America has experienced resurgence in Leftist politics, at least in part as a response to the failures of neoliberal reform (Castañeda 2006). In some states, new and progressive labor legislation has been passed. However, enforcement remains a problem due to lack of funds, inter-institutional coordination and appropriate infrastructure (Cobo 2005). It is in this context that civil society has begun to play a bigger role in labor-capital negotiations, replacing the state in some cases or accompanying the state in regulation. Alternative forms of governance have sought to fill the gap through private corporate codes of conduct that are monitored and enforced by third party certifiers. Critics warn that private codes exclude the state from labor-capital negotiations, further dismantling its capacity and weakening its incentive to establish political institutions to protect workers (Busch and Bain 2004; Seidman 2007). However, this paper explores the possibility that alternative forms of regulation can support the state in regulation and monitoring of labor laws. The following section discusses the rise of ethical codes within this context and looks at its role and ability to protect labor.

TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE: FAIR TRADE AND CODES OF CONDUCT

In the last several decades a new “moral discourse” has emerged in response to the negative impacts of neoliberal, free-market globalization (Dolan 2007:240). New forms of awareness have been fostered through NGO campaigns, media pressure and grassroots movements that make visible the plight of workers at the bottom of commodity chains. This awareness has generated alternative ideas on how to address

global economic and social inequalities, focused on increased governance over the production of goods, with a renewed emphasis on protecting labor. The following section explores the role of fair and ethical trade initiatives and codes of conduct in improving labor conditions on large-scale enterprises.

Governance of Large-Scale Enterprises

In the context of neoliberal globalization, export-oriented industries are notorious for their poor employment conditions, health and safety standards and treatment of temporary and female workers (Dolan 2007). Codes of conduct and ethical trade initiatives have become an important avenue through which labor standards are negotiated and practiced in transnational supply networks (Hale and Opondo 2005; Hughes 2001a; Hughes, Wrigley, and Buttle 2008; Riisgaard 2009b).

Global Value Chain literature is useful in understanding how different actors interact and influence one another within the production, circulation and consumption of goods. However, GVC literature is typically limited to analysis of value chain inclusion for producers, and little discussion has been given to differentiate producers from the workers they employ (Hale and Opondo 2005). A handful of recent studies have addressed this limitation by exploring the consequences of GVC restructuring for labor in large-scale enterprises and the potential of social codes to improve the lives of workers at the bottom of the chain (Dolan, Opondo, and Smith 2002; Hale and Opondo 2005; Hughes 2001b; Riisgaard 2008; Tallontire, Dolan, Smith, and Barrientos 2005). These studies unpack the governance structure of buyer-driven chains in the African horticulture industry, controlled by lead firms in the UK that encourage flexibilization and feminization of labor at the production end of GVCs.

To summarize the argument of Barrientos and Smith (2007:713), the greatest challenge for social codes is in their capacity to promote 'process' or 'enabling' rights. Process rights are focused on social justice issues, particularly worker empowerment. These rights are often sidestepped or simply overlooked by commercial actors who are focused on mere compliance with labor codes, and typically not interested in challenging existing social inequalities. It is predominantly in the realm of NGOs and trade unions where process rights are promoted in compliance with core ILO principles of freedom of association and no discrimination. Process rights seek to increase employee voice by including worker organizations in the dialogue and negotiation of worker rights. The purpose of process rights is to empower workers and challenge existing labor relations. How process rights are included in the discussion is crucial in determining the extent to which codes are capable of benefitting workers (Barrientos and Smith 2007).

Tallontire et al. (2005) explore the gender sensitivity of social codes in the Kenya-United Kingdom cut flower chain. They find that private social standards have the potential to improve working conditions broadly speaking, but fail to address the concerns of workers at the bottom of the chain; mainly the casual and female workers in the industry.

Similarly, in their study of Ethical Trade in African Horticulture, Dolan et al. (2002:60) find that although labor conditions have improved alongside code implementation in order for long-term change to impact employment conditions and contribute to gender rights, workers must be included in the process of code implementation. Drawing from the empirical data of Dolan et al. (2002), Hale and Opondo (2005) argue that private social codes have room to improve in the effort to

“humanize” the cut flower chain. Although the farms participating in this study were some of the most progressive and “best practice” farms in the industry, workers described a number of issues and concerns relating to poor working conditions, verbal abuse from supervisors and the threat of being fired.

Overall, workers were largely unaware of the labor codes intended to protect their rights, indicating a need for better communication and supervisor training. In fact, as Hale and Opondo (2005:313) conclude, “many of the problems reported by workers can be linked to poor communication between workers, supervisors and management.” The potential for codes to improve the lives of workers at the bottom of the chain requires more communication and inclusion of workers – it means listening to workers’ grievances, recognizing that female workers may have different concerns than their male counterparts and “facilitating mechanisms through which these grievances can be addressed” (Hale and Opondo 2005:304).

The types of mechanisms through which workers are theoretically able to voice their grievances include trade unions and worker committees. All social standard initiatives include some component related to labor-issues and worker representation, but some do so only generally while others are more explicit.

As Riisgaard (2009a:335) argues, it is helpful to think of labor (including trade unions and worker committees) as “an input with agency” in the process of improving the global value chain. In a study of cut flower industries in Kenya and Tanzania, Riisgaard (2009a:335) finds that social standards have the potential to “help mediate the power relations between labor and capital.” As she argues, labor organizations can utilize social standards to boost union participation, secure collective bargaining agreements, have a

better understanding of the operations of cut flower markets, have a voice in the discussion of social issues and assert a “watchdog function” by threatening “non-compliant businesses with exposure in consumer markets” (Riisgaard 2009a:335).

However, the capacity of labor organizations to be successful on these grounds is greatly limited. Riisgaard (2009a) points out that private standards typically address conditions only at the production node, failing to represent workers at other nodes. Another limitation is that social standards tend to neglect the pressures associated with the Global Value Chain. Riisgaard notes that “most social standards address labor conditions as if they were independent” and overlook the fact that “powerful retailers employing strategies such as cost-cutting and just-in-time ordering put additional pressure on suppliers and promote labor flexibilization, not labor organization” (Riisgaard 2009a:335).

Riisgaard concludes by asserting the importance of improving codes and awareness, not just the production end of the chain, but also at the buyer end of the cut flower chain – she notes how in East Africa labor organizations are attempting to connect private social standards with retailer buying strategies and labor conditions. This attempt shows how labor organizations strive “to employ standards to counter not just the adverse effects of value chain governance, but to actually reshape the governance itself” (Riisgaard 2009a:335).

While codes of conduct have made strides in improving labor conditions on large-scale enterprises, the literature reviewed here reveals that there are certain limitations to their capacity to improve the lives of workers at the bottom of the supply chain. In order for codes to be effective, they need to include workers in the discussion of what is fair,

while being cognizant of gender differences in workers' needs and concerns. Workers need to have mechanisms through which they can exercise their agency by voicing grievances to management. Furthermore, for labor standards to truly be transformative, they need to help reshape the way the commodity chain is governed by facilitating awareness at the buyer end of the chain

Fair and Alternative Trade

The Alternative Trade movement seeks to transform the market while operating from within it (Brown 1993; Reynolds 2000; Renard 2003). To paraphrase Taylor (2005:130), the greatest challenge of this movement is to prioritize alternative values such as social justice and environmental responsibility, without being subsumed by the impersonal values and powerful actors of the conventional market approach – the goal is to be “in the market but not of it.”

Fair Trade certification is an important labeling initiative that has grown from the Alternative Trade movement. Fair Trade has quickly secured itself as a highly successful market-based movement and shows signs of steady growth in years to come (Reynolds and Long 2007). FINE (2003) states:

Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade organizations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade.

To achieve greater equity, Fair Trade aims to improve the lives of marginalized workers and producers in the Global South by providing them a more ‘fair’ price and better working conditions.

It goes beyond the role of codes of conduct by facilitating awareness and education for buyers – relying on the purchasing power of consumers residing at the top of the global value chain, who are willing to “vote with their money” in an effort to promote a new model of global trade (Murray and Raynolds 2007:3). Consumers in the global north propel the movement by their willingness to pay a higher price for certified goods, which they can trust were produced in socially and environmentally conscious ways. Alternative trade organizations and fair trade networks strive to “shorten the distance between producers and consumers” by selling products directly to “ethically aware consumers” who are willing to pay above market prices to support marginalized producers (Raynolds 2002; Raynolds and Keahey 2008).

What makes Fair Trade certification unique from other social standards is its emphasis on trade criteria, including price guarantees and long term trade relations, which in theory, offer producers stability in characteristically volatile agricultural markets (Murray and Raynolds 2007).

Fair and Ethical Trade on Large-Scale Enterprises

Originally Fair Trade certification targeted small-scale producers in the global south; such as coffee producers who operate and grow on their own land and depend on family labor (Raynolds and Long 2007). In recent years however, the movement has expanded to include large-scale enterprises, such as cut flower producers, who depend on the labor of hundreds of employees to operate.

To paraphrase the argument made by Murray and Raynolds (2007), the addition of plantation style operations has been a controversial issue. Critics argue that it has undermined the very essence of Fair Trade’s mission to help the small-scale,

marginalized producers. On the contrary, proponents insist that to preserve the mission of helping ‘disadvantaged producers’, the movement must recognize that the most marginalized people in the Global South are landless workers. Furthermore, to make a substantial impact in the global economy, the movement must include key export commodities that are produced in large-scale enterprises

For large-scale enterprises, the Fair Trade price guarantee provides producers a sense of stability from the unpredictable world market, but it is in the social premium that most benefits workers by supporting health, educational, transportation and housing projects for employees and their communities (Raynolds and Keahey 2008:217). Fair trade goes beyond codes of conduct and ILO labor mandates in terms of gender awareness by promoting a “more empowerment-based strategy” that requires large-scale enterprises to “develop capacity-training programs for women, sexual harassment policies, and to progress towards proportional gender representation in company leadership” (Raynolds and Keahey 2008:221).

Representation and Partnership

An integral part of the Fair Trade movement’s mission is to “empower workers” by helping create safe working conditions, paying a living wage and ensuring their right to organize (FLO 2011a). A key to empowering the lives of workers on large-scale plantations means including them in the discussion of what is ‘fair.’ In compliance with International Labour Organization mandates, certified farms are expected to provide freedom of association and collective bargaining rights (FLO 2011a).

Representation is guaranteed by the permission to join trade unions; and when unions are not available, individual enterprises are required to provide the institutional

space for representation through democratically elected worker committees (Raynolds and Long 2007). Worker representation is emblematic of the movement's broader belief that through dialogue and partnership within the global value chain, social change is possible. This paper argues that representation is an important precondition for worker empowerment, but providing workers representation does not assume that they have been empowered to make significant changes within the farm.

One way to measure empowerment is by examining the ability of the worker committee to not only represent the interests of workers, but influence change within the farm. A social dialogue analysis is useful for this discussion. The ILO's working definition of social dialogue "includes all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest..." (Ishikawa 2003:3). The intensity of a social dialogue falls along a spectrum that can include a wide variety of actors and cover a broad range of issues.

As Stevis (2010) explains, the most basic form of dialogue is communication, or the simple exchange of information. This form does not assume authentic discussion or action to be taken on particular issues, but nonetheless is "an essential starting point towards more substantive social dialogue" (Ishikawa 2003:3). The next form is consultation, which assumes that the actors involved do more than merely share information, but "engage in more in-depth dialogue about issues raised" (Ishikawa 2003:3). Consultation does not imply decision-making power, but can be part of the process that leads to more influence. Negotiation is the next level of intensity for social dialogue. The term negotiation means that enterprises consider workers' organizations

(and unions) “as active counterparts rather than recipients of information or submitters of views as would be the case under consultation” (Stavis 2010:9).

Although Fair Trade aims to comply with the ILO mandate to provide “freedom of association and collective bargaining”, the latter is a significant challenge in the non-union sector. Collective bargaining involves a process of negotiations between employers (or employers’ representatives) and workers (or workers’ representatives) to decide on concerns related to wages and conditions of employment (Ishikawa 2003). Given the fact that the worker committee operates from within the enterprise, without legal backing, its influence is limited to the consultation realm.

The European Works Councils are an example of a mechanism designed to promote consultation and information sharing (Stavis 2010). These consultative bodies have been praised for promoting some level of worker input (Smith and Mouly 1998) and contributing to the democratization of working life (Blumberg 1968). However, without formal legal rights, consultation implies that management only need to consider the opinions of employee representatives on specific issues (Brewster, Wood, Croucher, and Brookes 2007). Consultative bodies have been shown to create a ‘common culture’ and commitment to a managerial-led agenda, with no real way to influence significant change (Wood 1998).

Nonetheless, in their case study of consultative arrangements at a European organization, Johnstone, Ackers and Wilkinson (2009) find that this approach can produce many positive outcomes for both management and employees. Management benefitted from information regarding employee opinion and morale, while representatives and employees had their voice heard by top-level management. This

process was contingent on positive working relationships between management and employee representatives however, and much depended on the attitudes of specific managers involved.

These broad theoretical concerns lay the framework for an understanding of the worker committee on Fair Trade Certified plantations. The following section will ground the discussion in the case of Ecuador and the history behind the flower industry, which will guide in the specification of my research questions.

CHAPTER III

ECUADORIAN FLOWER INDUSTRY

The rise of the cut flower industry in Ecuador coincides with a number of structural changes that occurred alongside the shift to neoliberalism. The industry's presence is highly controversial due to its many positive and negative consequences for rural communities in the highlands of Ecuador. The nature of flower production requires a tightly controlled global value chain, reliant on highly efficient transportation arrangements and the constant pressure to produce, compete and differentiate. The pressure to rationalize production and cut costs has led to an industry notorious for workers' rights violations and environmental abuses. In recent years new forms of governance have emerged to help ensure social and environmental responsibility. Fair Trade certification is unique among these alternatives by providing a mechanism for worker representation and partnership via the worker committee.

HISTORY & CONTEXT OF CUT-FLOWER INDUSTRY

As Thrupp (1995) and Sawers (2005) have outlined, in the 1980s Ecuador joined countries across Latin America in the creation of a nontraditional export (NTE) program, with support from international bodies such as United States Agency for International Development, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Launched as a neoliberal development strategy, NTE was part of a broader campaign to address the growing problem of widespread rural poverty by creating jobs in new industries. NTE development was promoted under structural

adjustment policy designed to reduce state intervention and increase national inclusion with global markets by exporting cheap manufactures and allowing foreign investment. Growth in the nontraditional sector includes the planting, handling and exportation of specialty items not native to the place of production – in Ecuador, the most common of which are flowers, fruits and shrimp (Thrupp 1995).

Flower production was initially located in economically developed nations such as The Netherlands and the United States. Consistent with global trends to shift production sites to developing nations, the flower industry has relocated to Latin America, Asia and Africa over the last couple decades. As Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama (2007) argue, the relocation of flower-export industry to Latin America was fueled by a number of factors; the availability of cheap labor and low labor standards among the most important.

In Latin America, Colombia was the first country to invest in flowers, followed by Ecuador a decade later. As Sawers (2005) argues, the delayed development of flowers in Ecuador was associated with several factors. First, when the industry began in Colombia in the 1970s, Ecuador was experiencing an economic boom in the oil industry that had strengthened the nation's currency, raising the value of other export commodities on the international market and weakening the manufacturing sector. Additionally, Ecuador's populist military government had imposed stifling controls for non-oil exports (Sawers 2005).

In the 1980s Ecuador adopted neoliberal strategies that set the stage for growth in the export flower industry (Sawers 2005). The state made several economic adjustments such as reducing tariffs and devaluing the national currency that made it more attractive

to foreign investment. Alongside the shift to neoliberal control, Ecuador proved to be the safer place to invest in export-industry due to more social and political stability than Colombia (Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007).

Ecuador's labor conditions also played a role in their comparative advantage. Ecuador has a lower level of economic development and higher rates of rural poverty and in the early stages of flower export development Ecuador's wage rate was between 20-25% lower than Colombia (BCE 2002; BRC 2005). Furthermore, compliance with labor laws and desire for labor reform was notoriously low in Ecuador, and rural trade unionism had a history of being weak (Anderson 1997; Vos 2000).

While rural unions have emerged in the coastal regions of Ecuador, in the rural highlands politics have revolved more around land and cultural rights rather than labor issues (Korovkin 2006). According to Korovkin's (2003) case study, flower workers have tried to organize trade unions to negotiate better and more secure working conditions. However, in each case the response of management has been to fire the 'troublemakers' and put their names on a black list (Korovkin 2003:26).

Economically speaking, export-led development through the flower industry was an immediate success. The value of flower exports in Ecuador increased more than 10 times from 1990 to 1998 and flowers soon became one of Ecuador's top exports (Expoflores 2003:44). The presence of the cut-flower industry marked a significant shift in rural communities, providing much needed jobs, but also transforming the social integrity of rural communities.

Job creation has been especially significant for women in the rural highlands who, prior to the flower industry's arrival, had very limited access to employment in the

formal sector. The majority of flower workers are rural women who traditionally are involved in peasant agriculture and household reproductive activities (Korovkin 2003:19). The industry's preference for female labor is indicative of the global trend of female participation in the formal market (Infante and Klein 1995; Standing 1999). In export-oriented industries such as the flower industry, this preference is often attributed to women's greater docility as embedded in patriarchal relations and reflected in their reluctance to challenge supervisors or join trade unions (Thrupp 1995).

The increased employment and earning power associated with flowers are factors that have been considered crucial to female empowerment (Newman 2002). Women have been recorded to feel more decisional autonomy over their spending (Korovkin 2003), however, it is known that women have a higher propensity to spend on human development than their male partners (Alberti 1991). On the other hand, women also face long working hours, occupational health problems, low wages and job insecurity (Harari 1994).

From her study conducted in an indigenous peasant community in northern Ecuador, Korovkin (2003) found that although flower plantation employment has helped make gender relations more equitable, it has adversely impacted community organization. Over the last several decades, rural communities in Ecuador have reinvented themselves in the context of social and political struggle, by constructing formal indigenous and peasant organizations. An important element of this study is an understanding of the indigenous movement in Ecuador, and with it, the rebirth of indigenous ethnic identities. This movement was engendered in the Andean highlands and helped re-invent

community-based organizations, such as women's groups, mingas, agriculture cooperatives and potable water associations (Korovkin 2006).

These community organizations have emerged as the foundation of rural civil society and are typically run by women, who have stepped up in the wake of male migration. However, with the rise of the cut-flower industry in the rural Andes, increasing numbers of young women are finding opportunities for paid employment. The dual impact of male migration and female employment in the flower industry has significantly changed the social fabric of rural communities.

GLOBAL VALUE CHAIN: FLOWER GROWERS

The cut-flower industry is part of a buyer-driven chain that connects workers, growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers to a chain that is both networked and hierarchical in nature (Ziegler 2007). The organizational structure of the industry follows corporate lines, controlled by domestic and foreign companies. The market is characterized by competition and downward pressure to cut costs and increase efficiency. The industry depends mainly on wage labor. Production relies on expensive modern technologies such as complex irrigation systems, greenhouses that control a specific microclimate, and a large number and variety of chemical inputs. The nature of flower production is a particularly time sensitive and labor-intensive operation. Maintaining a competitive position in the market requires the continuous and efficient harvesting, packaging and exporting of flowers to their destination in perfect condition.

In order to understand how pressure is transferred down the commodity chain, it is important to unpack what it is like to be in the shoes of an Ecuadorian cut flower producer, or grower. Growers are usually well-educated, successful businessmen who

are established enough to access the financial resources to enter and survive in a capital-intensive business such as flower exports (Ziegler 2007). They operate within a commodity chain that is generally linked with two marketing routes: consignment or direct transaction. The majority of growers send their flowers on consignment to an importer in Miami who serves as an intermediary, channeling the flowers to wholesalers, supermarkets, mass marketers and bouquet-makers. Direct marketing is the route for growers with direct access to actors such as wholesalers or supermarkets. While these types of transactions are more desirable and secure, they also require higher levels of capital and include the constant pressure to “innovate, gather information, and establish several kinds of relationships (Ziegler 2007:118).

Both routes rely on an extended commodity chain, as growers are nearly entirely dependent on a consumer base concentrated in the U.S. The difficulties in acquiring the appropriate knowledge to engage distant markets make this business risky and complicated. It is crucial that growers are in line with what can be subtle shifts in tastes and trends from their consumer base, which often requires balancing multiple seasonal and holiday cycles between different countries and regions. This gives those who are able to innovate and maintain relationships a considerable advantage (Ziegler 2007).

Demands are passed to growers from the level of wholesale florists, importers, supermarkets and bouquet makers, so that the grower is responsible for a wide selection of roses and a large volume in each variety. Pressure is exerted from importers, who are also connected to a dense web of competition, constantly seeking the best quality flowers for the lowest price. Formal contracts are virtually non-existent in this industry, so growers attempt to gain a competitive edge and a sense of security by establishing

relationships with Miami importers-wholesalers (consignment) and traditional wholesalers (direct). Positive relationships benefit both the growers and importers, who are each seeking stability, quality and profit in a volatile market (Ziegler 2007).

Marketing is a complicated and difficult business, and in Ecuador is a task that is generally pursued by each individual grower. Unlike their European counterparts, Ecuadorian growers have not benefited from the advantages associated with cooperation. This is reflected in the considerable low membership in Expoflores, the association of Ecuadorian flower exporters. Instead of working together, growers absorb the risks and costs of marketing alone. Attempts to innovate and diversify species are usually an “individual process of trial and disappointment” (Ziegler 2007:85). Furthermore, burdens are associated with the lack of state support and inadequate airport infrastructure, increasing minimum wages and new labor legislation; all which increase costs for Ecuadorian growers, making their survival in the market and competition with Colombian and African countries all the more challenging.

In sum, there are considerable costs and risks that make the flower industry in Ecuador a very difficult business. Growers absorb the pressures and burdens that are filtered down the chain from intermediary or traditional importers. These pressures are directly linked to fluctuating trends that stem from culturally, socially and spatially distant consumers (Ziegler 2007). A growers’ logical response is to cut costs in order to survive. To maintain their low order advantage, Ecuadorian flower growers feel that they must keep labor and raw material costs at the bare minimum so that they can effectively compete with African and Asian countries, who have flooded the market with cheap

flowers which they are able to produce with lower labor costs than Latin America (CEA 1999).

In recent years in particular, survival in the industry has become much more difficult alongside the phasing out of cheap state credits and rising commercial bank rates (Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007), a faltering global economy and higher labor costs. In 2000 Ecuador adopted the US dollar, which made further devaluation impossible. The cost of minimum wage has been steadily increasing over the years (the most recent increase in 2008 labor constitution) adding to labor costs. Additional strains have accompanied the global economic crisis, making survival all the more risky.

The pressure to compete and prosper in the market is experienced not only by growers who are struggling to survive, but also channeled from growers down to labor and the environment. The next section explores some of the negative consequences of the flower industry in Ecuador. It is argued that the process of producing flowers in a rational market that demands efficiency and productivity results in many irrationalities; the costs absorbed by people and the environment.

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS

The insecurity and risks faced by growers create a strong incentive to increase worker productivity and efficiency, while also cutting labor costs. Consistent with trends across Latin America, the labor market for the flower industry is marked by flexibility associated with insecure contracts (or no contracts), wage cuts, increasing pressure on productivity, health hazards and the denial of trade unions (Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007).

Labor arrangements include full-time contracts, temporary contracts, and *contratistas* (intermediary contractor), which include unskilled labor hired for specific tasks.

Although full-time contracts are protected from casual dismissal by law, Krupa (2001) notes that farm managers are able to manipulate reasons for firing employees very easily.

Many flower farms operate under a productivity system, which has been implemented to cut labor costs, while still maintaining a quality product. Often this system puts “workers into a highly disadvantageous position with management”, as each individual’s productivity is measured against the few who are the most productive on the farm (Korovkin 2003:25). Workers have been rewarded for high productivity and reprimanded or even harassed for low-productivity. Under this system, workers who do not meet the daily quota must stay on the farm until their assignments are finished, extending hours far beyond the 40-hour workweek, but without overtime wages. In recent years, the productivity system has increased, making for longer workdays. Moreover, employees are required to work on Sunday and additional hours during peak seasons, but are often paid the same or even lower wages for the additional work (Korovkin 2003).

Another concern for workers within the industry is occupational health hazards. Floriculture is highly dependent on agro-chemicals, applying an average of 30 chemicals per week and using up to 80 different chemicals, many of which are carcinogenic and/or cause neurological and dermatological pathologies. In fact, many companies use products that have been banned in Europe and North America (Cobo 2004; Harari, Korovkin, Larrea, Martínez, and Ortiz 2004). Although national labor codes call for the regulation of pesticide use and protection, similar to the labor code, these are not

typically enforced within the flower sector (Korovkin 2003; Pálan and Pálan 1999).

In terms of natural resources, the industry has been highly criticized for several negative environmental effects. The Municipality of Cayambe has not been able to regulate the disposal of contaminated waste, which causes run-off that impacts the community's water supply and ecological system (CEDA 2001). Floriculture has been linked to the salinization and erosion of soil as well as the contamination and excessive use of water (Acción Ecológica 2000).

Typically workers do not stay employed with the same company, or within the industry, for very long. In fact, high labor turnover is a “structural feature” of the Ecuadorian cut-flower industry, creating an additional strain for management who has to constantly train new employees, as well as a symptom of unappealing work for employees who are constantly shifting (Korovkin 2003:26).

The combination of occupational health issues, increasing pressure for productivity and long hours without overtime wages are some of the many reasons that make labor in this industry precarious and unstable. For growers, survival in this competitive industry and volatile market requires keeping costs low and dealing with the constant pressure to increase production. The logic of a rational market requires efficiency and calculability. Corporate rules demand long hours and high levels of productivity from workers. During periods of peak demand in the Global North, such as Valentine's Day or Mother's Day, farms have to dramatically increase production, requiring workers to work long hours for several weeks in a row. Meeting the demands of distant consumers requires workers and producers to be flexible. Satisfying market demand means prioritizing capital over labor.

LABOR GOVERNANCE IN THE CUT-FLOWER INDUSTRY

In recent years the cut flower industry has made significant strides to improve its image and practices. Media pressure and NGO campaigns have generated consumer interest in the conditions under which goods are produced in export-oriented industries in developing countries, putting pressure on growers to produce in more socially and environmentally conscious ways. This section explores several important shifts that have made labor and environmental conditions more visible in the cut flower industry.

In 2008 Ecuador passed a new labor legislation that supports the shift towards more regulated labor conditions. The new law protects worker rights in a number of ways, among other things including: raising the required minimum wage, prohibiting child labor, ensuring social security benefits and formal contracts, and limiting the number of hours worked.

Additionally, a new wave of ethical certifications attempts to make labor and the environment more visible in the production of flowers. In the absence of rural trade unions, and to help support governmental regulation, the rise of ethical certifications has become an important avenue for workers' rights. For flower growers there is incentive to differentiate their business in an increasingly competitive market that is now demanding more social and environmental responsibility.

One way that flower farms can do this is by joining Expoflores, Ecuador's association of export flower growers. Expoflores has focused on creating an international image of the aesthetically perfect Ecuadorian rose and steers away from the dependence on brokers (who appease only the anonymous, mass flower markets). Through a program called FlorEcuador, Expoflores sells a new image of certified roses as not just top-quality

flowers, but flowers grown in environmentally and socially responsible conditions (Expoflores 2009).

Expoflores has made efforts to improve the industry by upgrading worker skills, reducing the use of chemical pesticides (and encouraging farms to obtain organic certification), working with community development, and complying with national labor law. However, as Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama (2007) point out, Expoflores does not provide any avenue for worker participation in the certification process, nor does it include a mechanism for worker representation. Moreover, because Expoflores is an industry-created code, adherence is ultimately self-regulated and voluntary, making compliance reportedly weak (Vexler 2006).

Fair Trade certification is an alternative initiative in the flower industry, which seeks to improve labor conditions and provide growers access to a niche market for Fair Trade goods. The idea is that through price guarantees and long-term trade relations, Fair Trade provides producers more stability from the conventional market and thus the incentive and cushion to invest more in labor. Where Ecuadorian growers are experiencing intense competition and pressure to cut labor costs, ideally Fair Trade certification can provide them access to a market where the process of production is the marketing advantage, rather than solely relying on quality, cost or variety as their competitive edge. Pressure from the commodity chain still exists in the Fair Trade market, only the focus of the pressure includes labor as a valuable part of the equation.

Central to Fair Trade's mission is to provide workers representation and a mechanism through which they can voice grievances. A key challenge for Fair Trade to improve conditions for workers is to coordinate and bolster worker organizations,

particularly trade unions (Raynolds and Murray 2007). In the context of Ecuador, where trade unions are not active in the flower growing regions, the current strategy is to provide representation through democratically elected worker committees. The extent to which these function effectively is central to this discussion.

The following section gives a brief overview of the Fair Trade certification standards and regulations for large-scale enterprises. It provides more depth into how regulations are designed to protect and empower hired labor.

Fair Trade Criteria

Fair Trade standards for Hired Labor (FLO 2011b) are designed to improve the social, environmental and economic spheres of development for flower workers and their communities. Certification first requires farms to comply with national labor law, serving as an additional regulatory mechanism to the state.

As part of Fair Trade social development criteria, hired labor standards are designed to ensure that workers' basic human rights are protected under the International Labour Organization mandates (FLO 2011a). As described above, freedom of association and collective bargaining rights are protected under ILO mandates.

Additionally, fair trade incorporates the following tenets:

- freedom from discrimination (on the grounds of race, religion, gender, politics, and ethnic or social origin)
- fair conditions of employment (wages, working hours, overtime, sick pay, leave etc)
- no forced or child labor (minimum age of 15 years)
- occupational health and safety (a safe working environment)

In terms of occupational health hazards, Fair Trade ensures safety measures to protect employee exposure to agro-chemicals. Part of the certification process involves on-site training to raise awareness about chemicals and the appropriate protective gear for employees. It also requires that plantations permanently ban some of the most dangerous pesticides and commit to moving towards more organic practices (FLO 2011a).

According to Fairtrade International an initial full audit can range from four days to six or seven weeks, depending on the size and complexity of the organization, and the number of certified products it is seeking to sell. Once an enterprise receives its initial Fairtrade certification, it is inspected annually through an on-site audit. Representatives from FLO-CERT, a third party organization that operates independently from FLO, conduct the audits. Auditors spend as many as several days on the farm ensuring that paperwork and logging of hours corresponds with requirements, checking protective uniforms and types of chemicals used, and interviewing workers about labor conditions (FLO 2011b).

Fair Trade provides workers an additional benefit through the social premium, to be invested in community projects (FLO 2011b). The social premium is a portion of the profit earned by the sale of a certified flower, which is given directly to benefit the workers through community development projects. The money is used to benefit all of the workers on a certified farm through projects, such as the building of a housing development or supporting educational or health programs (Raynolds and Keahey 2008).

In addition to these requirements, Fair Trade certified farms are expected to provide workers training workshops and create worker committees designed to allow freedom of association (FLO 2011b). Part of Fair Trade's commitment to go beyond just

being a socially responsible set of standards, means improving the lives of disadvantaged plantation workers by increasing their empowerment and well-being (FLO 2009). This involves their participation in the discussion of fair working conditions and representation in the form of democratically elected worker committees. There are two worker organizations within fair trade certified farms – the “joint body” is composed of workers and management, formed to provide oversight to the premium management and distribution. Workers are given the authority in decision-making (FLO 2011b). The “worker committee” is designed to provide freedom of association for workers, particularly when unions are not available, voicing grievances and fighting for workers’ rights (FLO 2011b).

In order to maintain certification, farms are required to keep these worker organizations operating effectively. These committees are intended to have many ‘positive outcomes’ in the ‘development of good working relationships between the management and workers; the empowerment of members through the process of working with Fair Trade; the acquisition of skills in leadership and communication, project planning and project management necessary to function effectively; developing the capacity to operate without further assistance’ (FLO 2009).

An integral part of the Fair Trade mission is worker empowerment. This paper argues that representation paves the road for the type of worker empowerment that can improve fair working conditions on the farm and the process of monitoring of the seal. However, it does not assume that providing workers representation means that they are empowered. The extent to which the worker committee serves to benefit workers has yet to be explored on Fair Trade certified farms in Ecuador.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to demonstrate how management's drive to rationalize production in order to compete in the rational marketplace both constrains and enables worker empowerment through the worker committee. My research questions draw from the theoretical discussion in Chapter two. The Ecuadorian flower industry is embedded in a global capitalist economy that favors rationalism, productivity and competition. Through the global commodity chain, pressure from distant consumers is transferred down the line onto producers to produce more goods and compete in a rational marketplace. Survival requires producers in the flower industry to simultaneously cut costs and increase production. Historically, the industry is notorious for labor rights and environmental abuses. While fair trade certified farms are required to comply with social regulations that ensure the institutional space for worker representation via the worker committee, it does not insulate management from the pressures associated with survival in this industry. In this context, what are the rationalization processes that impact the lives of workers and managers?

Furthermore, on fair trade certified farms the worker committee is designed to address some of the problems that arise from the pressure of working and operating a successful flower farm. The goal is to bring workers and managers together in a dialogue space to discuss fair working conditions. The worker committee seeks to empower workers at the bottom of the commodity chain by giving them voice and representation within the farm. However, the committee's power is confined to consultation, meaning that decision-making authority ultimately rests with management. Workers' ability to influence change is limited to the low-level issues the committee is designed to address

and management's willingness to incorporate workers' input. Nonetheless, providing workers representation and the channels to communicate with management could help pave the road for worker empowerment. This study explores: To what extent does the worker committee serve as a forum for communication between workers and managers to promote representation?

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

The fieldwork for this project was conducted in Ecuador during the Spring and Summer of 2010. I came to Ecuador as a Research Assistant for my advisor, Laura Reynolds, who received funding through the National Science Foundation to conduct the study: Fair Trade, Gender and Socio-Economic Conditions in the Global Cut Flower Network.

Based on the specifications of the NSF project, the research for this project was conducted in two different flower-growing provinces in the Ecuadorian highlands. Four flower plantations were included in the study, 2 in the respective provinces: Cotopaxi and Pichincha.

It is noted that although my thesis has benefitted from the data and understanding I obtained through my work as a research assistant for the NSF project, my findings and interpretations are independent from the NSF study.

MY ROLE IN THE SETTING

As qualitative researchers have pointed out (e.g. Thorne 1993), Westerners doing fieldwork in different cultures find themselves in a humbling position of novice. At the end of each day I was acutely aware of my fatigue, relieved that I had survived another day, but overwhelmed by the amount of field notes I felt inclined to write. Every cultural nuance and new word made an impact on me, and because I was new to the setting I had a keen eye for things that insiders take for granted.

Given the demographic differences between myself and those who participated in the study, my membership within the setting was peripheral (Adler and Adler 1987:37). How I looked and carried myself undoubtedly influenced how participants responded to me and how the research unfolded. Furthermore, what I was able to see was shaped by the lens I wore even before entering the field. Charmaz (2006:15) illustrates this point by saying:

Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world. Researchers and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of each other. Nevertheless, researchers, not participants, are obligated to be reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it.

In an attempt to be reflexive, I tried to remain as neutral and descriptive as I could in my observations and assumptions. Despite language and cultural barriers, I found that it was possible to communicate and connect with nearly all of our participants. In many of my interviews and conversations, it was our differences that allowed us to connect. In fact, many people seemed to take me under their wing in a motherly or fatherly sort of way. Older men and women wanted to teach me things and invited me to spend time with their families. Most men, and some women who were close to my age seemed intrigued by my presence and wanted to know more about my culture and share their stories.

Nonetheless, there were certain differences that became barriers as well. All social interactions are influenced by “ascriptive categories”, such as gender, age, and race or ethnicity – as necessary criteria for us to differentiate among people (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006:23). In the context of research, these differences can make us more aware of the distinction between the researcher and those being researched. For

instance, on several occasions I spoke with Indigenous women who were more comfortable speaking Quechua - they could not understand me because of my accent and the interviews were short and lacked depth. Other times I simply could not understand the dialect of Spanish being spoken, and my assistant had to help interpret. Some participants seemed resistant to open up with me, and I was sensitive to the possibility that they were scared, intimidated or threatened by my presence. I also worried that they just did not want to participate, but felt obligated to do so. In contrast, with several interviews when I probed for a deeper understanding, I felt that I encouraged some exaggerated responses, as workers aligned with what they thought I wanted to hear.

While it is important to note the ascriptive categories that can influence the acquisition of rich data, Lofland et al. (2006) warn that these categories “should not be overemphasized” and that even though differences remain, one should not assume that block or even make the research process much more difficult.

NSF PROJECT

For the NSF project I conducted one hundred forty four survey interviews with flower workers from 4 different Fair Trade Certified farms (thirty six survey interviews per farm with eighteen men and eighteen women from each). I also conducted interviews with various actors connected to the industry including 4 members of Expoflores (an industry group for flower growers), a union representative, 2 businessmen associated with the industry and 2 academics who had done research on the industry in some capacity.

Additionally, I accompanied my advisor Dr. Laura Reynolds during her farm visits and interviews with management and workers. With Dr. Reynolds, I participated in

semi-structured interviews with a total of 5 flower plantation owners and 8 members of management. I also accompanied her and participated in focus groups with members of the Joint Bodies and Worker Committees from each farm and general focus groups with sixteen to twenty regular female flower workers from 3 out of the 4 flower plantations.

Typical day in the field

A typical day for me in the field began in the afternoon between 1-2pm when I would meet up with the local assistant, Jose, who I had hired to help me in locating research participants and record notes during interviews. Jose and I would ride the local bus to the outskirts of town where the bus dropped us off on the highway near a dirt road. From here we hired a truck to take us to the flower plantation, a five- minute drive from the main highway. From here we waited outside the farm gates from anywhere between 10 minutes to 2 hours for workers to get off. During the wait we talked with the guard on duty about their day, the flower plantation, and on occasion even interviewed them.

Workers were typically let out in waves, as different areas finished sooner than others. As a group of workers rushed to the gates they had to stop and sign out with the guard individually. We waited on the other side of the gate and asked each one how their day was and for their name. If they were part of the NSF sample we asked if they would be willing to do the survey, and if not, we asked if they knew of and could help locate another person on our list.

At each farm we relied on a manager to help us locate individual workers. For 3 out of the 4 farms we were able to meet with many workers from our sample on the farm before interviews began. During this time I shared the details of the project, that the survey was anonymous and I explained informed consent. My biggest concern was that

workers associated us with management from the farm and thus made some feel obligated to participate. I made sure to explain carefully that we did not work for the farm, that their participation was completely voluntary and that their real names would be withheld in the write-up of the research.

When we located participants outside the farm we asked if we could accompany them home in order to complete the survey. This was the best way to track down where people lived, considering the small rural communities were comprised of meandering dirt roads without street names. Since many workers live in the same communities, we relied on each participant to help us locate the home of the next. Thanks to the advancement of technology, we also relied heavily on the use of cell phones. Nearly all of the workers owned a cell phone and so we always tried to call before our visits, typically to get directions to peoples' homes. On a normal day we were able to get 2-3 interviews done, and usually they were conducted in participants' homes.

Many days seemed like a wild goose chase trying to locate participants' homes, especially since our work was conducted in the afternoon and evenings after work. An entry from my field notes helps illustrate our scramble in locating workers in rural communities. We had just finished interviewing two brothers who work at one our farms and had asked one to help us:

One of the brothers came with us to help us find the next interview. We drove around on narrow, cobblestone streets off the beaten path looking for this woman who doesn't own a cell phone. We asked several people if they knew her – the first woman said that she was her aunt and directed us to go up the hill to find her home. As we did, we stopped to ask an old man walking his bike up the hill if he knew her – he indicated further up the hill. Something about the scene just made me feel content and happy to be here looking for these peoples' homes. The lighting was gorgeous as the sun was just beginning to fall – we could see the peak of Cotopaxi, covered in snow and Chimborazo in the distance.

Everything here is so green and as we slowly chugged up the hill in the old car indigenous women in their panama hats and skirts crossed the road directing their cattle... one younger woman was carrying her baby on her back. Someone directed us to one of the houses in the distance so we hopped out and skirted across the narrow path between rows of tall corn stalks. As with every home here, dogs came running out to greet us barking and sniffing our legs. Jose asked the older man and woman who came out “*disculpame, conoce la doña ...*” (excuse me, do you know Ms. _____). They directed us down the hill to different home (we are getting in the habit of asking multiple people where someone lives and getting told multiple different directions).

By this time it was starting to get quite dark and we walked down the road quickly, assuming that we would have to move on to another person’s house because this one was a loss... then we heard some woman calling out at as “*buenas noches!*”... we turned around and a little old Indigenous woman was coming down the road behind us. She said that she had been waiting for us! It was finally the woman we had been looking for. We followed her down the narrow dirt path, between her corn stalks to her little home, next to her thatched-roof barn. She told us to enter her home where she had table and a bench. She was such a kind woman and said several times that she would do her best to understand. I assumed that it was because of my pronunciation that she couldn’t understand some of the words – but quickly I realized by her accent, and the fact that she mentioned her husband could help her understand, that she meant the Spanish words. She couldn’t understand because she speaks Quechua.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research for my thesis was done in conjunction with the data collection I was responsible to complete through the NSF project. My thesis project benefitted from the broader NSF research in terms of gaining access to my subjects and research sites. While my topic overlaps in many ways with the themes of the NSF project, it is also independent, in that I conducted interviews on my own time, outside of my work as research assistant. My experience involved gathering rich and textured data that allowed for what Creswell (1998:15) describes as a “complex, holistic picture” of the world that surrounded me.

Through the process of writing I discovered that in addition to my interview data, it is the aggregate of countless hours in the field that help to create an image and a story

in my mind of what it is like to work in the flower industry. As Becker (1996) explains, a researcher needs to be aware of the data that surround them in the things they see and hear, being mindful enough to record their observations in their field notes. Some of my richest data are grounded in the extended observation and sense-making that came about through living in flower communities, eating meals with families, walking workers home from the plantation and playing with their children.

I used grounded theory as the primary methodological approach for my thesis data collection. Grounded theorists differ from quantitative researchers in that they “aim to fit their emerging theories with their data” rather than test preconceived hypotheses through statistical inferences (Charmaz 2006:101).

Grounded theorists strive to learn what is going on from the beginning of their research and consider various themes and theoretical frameworks throughout the process of data collection, all the while remaining open and flexible to change. It is common for the actual research to evolve and stray from the original proposal (Charmaz 2006).

For instance, at the onset I wanted to examine the notion of “empowerment” for flower workers who were members of a worker committee on Fair Trade Certified farms. I hoped to unveil not only how they conceived of this word, but also how their membership on a committee had made them feel either more or less empowered as workers. I designed my interview questions accordingly, using the word ‘empowerment’ in its literal translation as *‘empoderamiento.’*

Quickly I discovered that the concept was lost through this translation. People looked at me with confused stares rather than respond to my questions. I immediately had to eliminate the word, and the research question from my design.

Instead I let the interviews proceed with more general questions about the worker committees, representation and whether workers felt that they could speak with management. As Ambert, Adler, Adler and Detzer (1995:884) argue, qualitative research is a “cyclical and evolutionary” process, not “linear” in form, as is the typical quantitative approach. Grounded theorists use flexible guidelines in order to reveal “participants’ standpoints and situations, as well as their actions within the setting” (Charmaz 2006:46). Using this strategy, my questions changed and my approach became flexible with each participant, as I tried to let their perspectives of what was relevant guide the interview.

THESIS PROJECT BACKGROUND

I began research on my thesis in the Fall of 2010, months before I would leave for fieldwork in Ecuador. My initial idea was to study the social dynamics of rural community organizations alongside the flower industry, looking specifically at the intersection of gender and ethnic identity. My goal was to unpack how ethnic identity shapes organization within the fair trade flower industry, whether through participation in on-farm worker committees or in rural community organizations. I planned to interview indigenous flower workers.

Once in the field however, I realized that in order to complete both the NSF and my thesis projects, I would not have time to select my participants based on ethnicity. I decided to broaden my research questions to better understand the role and effectiveness of the worker committee in promoting representation. Given that I had an opportunity to sit in on interviews with flower plantation owners and managers, as well as conduct some of my own, I gained a richer and more complex view of the flower industry. Trying to

view the industry through the lens of workers and managers helped me see the various challenges that both groups face in their respective roles.

Research Participants

Participants for my thesis project were chosen based on timing and willingness on their part to talk with me. Given the time requirements of my work for the NSF project, I had to fit interviews into a tight schedule that was dependent on their work hours and availability. My interviews were done with people who were willing to speak with me, most of whom were also participants in the NSF project. I also used a snowballing technique, or chain referral sampling, which yields a study sample through referrals and acquaintances of existing study subjects (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). With each participant I asked if they had friends or family members who they thought would be interested in participating in the study.

Unfortunately my sample population is not ethnically diverse and thus not representative of the broader demographic make-up. Of the flower workers that I interviewed, 1 participant self identified as Indigenous, another as Afro-Ecuadorian and the remaining nineteen as Mestizo. Four of the participants were originally from the Coast, but had migrated to the region in search of work in the flower industry. Of the management positions I interviewed, all were Mestizo. In my sample, thirteen of the worker participants were female and 8 were male. Of the management positions interviewed, the owner was a male, while the three supervisors were female. Ages of participants ranged from nineteen to thirty eight.

Data Collection

I gathered data for my thesis, independent of the NSF research in the form of in-depth interviews, active participation in observation of the field sites and recorded field notes whenever possible. I conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with flower workers that lasted from 10 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. I recorded 8 of the sessions using a digital recorder in conjunction with written field notes. The 8 recorded interviews took place in participants' homes. The twelve that were not recorded were conducted in various locations, while on the bus or in the car, while walking home from the flower farm, or at a time where it was not appropriate to use a recorder. Additionally, I interviewed a flower owner and 3 managers. These interviews were done with 2 subjects in each session and both sessions were recorded.

I found that a small group of research participants would allow more of an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of flower workers and that in conjunction with the larger group of research participants I talked with for the NSF project, my understanding of the industry and their lives was greatly enriched. I gained access to my participants through the relationships that emerged from the NSF project. As Lofland et al. (2006:67) explain, the quality of fieldwork a researcher is able to obtain depends greatly on field relations. It is through relations with people that a researcher gains “intimate, up-close access to the happenings, events, and routines that constitute any particular social setting.” Obtaining different kinds of relationships with various actors within the field allows for multiple perspectives and a more contextualized understanding of the setting (Lofland et al. 2006). Through my interviews with workers, managers and key participants in the flower industry, my understanding of the flower

industry became much more complex and layered as my fieldwork proceeded. In order to make sense of the various perspectives and experiences shared with me, I had to learn to trust my own interpretation as well.

Adler and Adler (1987:34) say that in the process of conducting fieldwork, the researcher's "own perspectives, experiences, and emotions become equally important to the accounts gathered from others." Even the researcher's subjective opinion is valuable to the study (Peshkin 1985). An ethnographer can only take in a certain amount of information – at some point one engages in particular activities or with particular people rather than others. It is possible that relationships develop along political divides and the researcher is thus exposed more heavily to one perspective over another. Because of this, the goal of the ethnographer "is not to determine 'the truth' but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995:3) and in the research setting.

This thesis is an attempt to shed light on the multiple truths revealed to me through the course of my fieldwork experience. I value greatly each of the perspectives shared with me by many different actors and hope that I have represented their voices accurately. To protect the confidentiality of all participants who so graciously provided their input, allowed me access, and shared their lives with me, I have changed the name of all actors and farms involved in the study. I have incorporated some data from the NSF project to supplement the data collected independently for my thesis. I use the NSF survey data as a secondary source and differentiate each quote as such: either (NSF interview,) or (Thesis interview, #). I rely extensively on observational data that I gathered while doing research for the NSF project and for my thesis. This data provides

the foundation of my interpretations while in the field and frames the overall themes in this paper. However, it should be noted that my interpretations are solely my own and go beyond what I was hired to do as a research assistant for the NSF project. Therefore, my analysis does not represent the NSF analysis.

Interviews

The approach taken for my thesis interviews was different than the survey approach utilized for the NSF. My approach was similar to how Lofland et al. (2006) describe the interview process as a combination of observation, ordinary conversation, listening, and the use of a flexible interview guide with open-ended questions. The idea behind this method was to remain open so that new questions could emerge in the conversation in order for the respondents' to truly share their voice (Phillips 2002). As the interviews proceeded, my ideas took shape and theoretical frameworks began to emerge.

My interviewing proceeded as Kahn and Cannell (1957:149) describe as “a conversation with a purpose.” I tried to be sensitive to each participant in order to know how to explore further questions based on their comfort levels, concerns and vulnerabilities. I tried to allow for the participant's perspective to unfold as the participant viewed it, rather than how I viewed it as a researcher (Marshall and Rossman 2006:101), careful in the way that I probed for answers. Some of my interviews turned into long, drawn out conversations, while others ended quickly after only a few questions.

Data Analysis

In a grounded theory approach it is important compare your data from the beginning of the research and throughout the collection process in order to be aware of

emerging categories and their relations to broader concepts. Data analysis is an ongoing process that includes “classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together description of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin and Rubin 2005:201).

I was able to transcribe some of my interviews while in the field as I was collecting data. This allowed me to begin the coding process, which includes making labels for certain themes and concepts from the data and begin grouping them together. I was able to interact with my data and define meaning within it. Upon my arrival back to the United States I continued this process of transcription, translation and coding. Data analysis is a long and tedious process. I was able to hire two native Spanish speaker students who assisted me in transcribing my interviews. From there I continued the coding and analysis process and found the words of Charmaz (2006:47) to be especially relevant:

We may think our codes capture the empirical reality. Yet it is *our* view: we choose the words that constitute our codes. Thus we define what we see as significant in the data and describe what we think is happening.

RESEARCH ISSUES

Given the different methodological approaches, there were certain things that my thesis project could accomplish beyond the NSF projects’ capabilities. Although the survey data from the NSF project provided a more representative sample of flower workers, the in-depth style of interviewing conducted for my thesis allowed for a more textured and detailed account of workers’ perspectives. In-depth interviews are negotiated and interactive, reliant on open-ended questions that give participants more of

a voice. In some cases I found that in-depth interviews conducted for my thesis provided data that enriched, but also complicated the data gained through the NSF project.

For instance, it seemed that workers felt more comfortable opening up about certain topics, and more comfortable being critical of their work during the in-depth interviews. During my interviews I had the flexibility to probe people and get deeper into the discussion and more off-script than I did while following a set of survey questions. Conversations seemed to flow more organically through this approach, and led to various tangents that were not within the scope of my research questions.

Moreover, part of the NSF data collection was conducted with workers and managers while on the farm grounds. Workers were interviewed in focus groups on the farm, with supervisors close by, or at times in the room during the sessions. Physical location became an important methodological concern as I learned that workers felt far more comfortable speaking freely in the context of their own homes, or in any context away from their work.

During survey interviews in workers' homes, several commented to me that they wished FLO or the owner of the flower farm would come to their homes to get their real perspectives, away from the work environment. During in-depth interviews for my thesis several workers echoed the claim that they felt more comfortable speaking away from work.

Access

Access to the research sites was secured through the NSF project. I accompanied Dr. Reynolds to the farms for on-site interviews and focus groups, with the understanding

that management would grant me access in the coming weeks to pursue survey interviews with workers individually in their homes, after work hours.

Marshall and Rossman (2006:77) note that receiving formal approval in a research setting often takes “time, patience, and sensitivity to the rhythms and norms of a group.” At each farm I had to negotiate my start date, taking into consideration where workers and management were at in terms of production level, or in relation to an auditor’s visit.

Given the tight time schedule I had to keep in order to complete the surveys, I often felt a sense of urgency in this process, but with each farm was humbled by management’s willingness to provide me access, support and encouragement to complete this project. At each farm the management team was open and eager to learn from the study. They helped me locate workers and took time out of their busy schedules to organize meetings with participants, and even took time to talk with me. Without the cooperation and guidance of each farm’s management, both projects would have been impossible.

Research Schedule

Conducting field research is a challenging task, one that Shaffir and Stebbins (1991:1) say is often times “inconvenient, physically uncomfortable, often embarrassing, and always tense.” Given the nature of the research, it was important that I interview participants after work hours. This required long hours in the afternoon and evenings, and long periods of waiting and searching for people. Many times we were unable to locate participants’ homes and would have to end the night short of our goal, or move on to alternates who were available and whom we could locate.

It was a challenge to find the time to interview people independently for my thesis project. Interviews were conducted on some nights until 9-9:30 pm, meaning that participants were tired from a long day of work and my assistant and I were tired from completing multiple interviews. It was a constant challenge for me to remain fresh and energetic and to keep focused on the survey questions. Nonetheless, having the opportunity to meet with people in their homes and interview the amount of participants that I was able to, provided me a rich, deep and contextualized understanding of many people's experiences. Workers' willingness to engage with me was key to the completion of this project.

Cultural Differences

Another methodological concern pertained to a local cultural norm. In Ecuador it is expected that when asked for a favor, for directions, or for help with something, that you say yes. Particularly in the more rural settings, people responded that they were willing to complete the survey, even if they seemed somewhat resistant or fearful. I made efforts to communicate very clearly that the survey was anonymous and completely voluntary, hoping to give them the freedom to say no. Nonetheless, I was always concerned that workers might feel obligated to participate.

Another concern was that because of my role as a Westerner and a 'researcher', and due to the fact that I had spent time on the farm conducting interviews with management, workers seemed to associate me with the farm management. I made a concerted effort to dispel any fears participants had about speaking with me freely, by reiterating that I did not work for the farm and that all of their interviews were anonymous. Nonetheless, it was obvious that I was acquainted with management – often

times when owners and supervisors left the farm at the end of the day I was waiting outside the gates and they would wave at me. While it was very nice to have developed a friendly relationship with management vital to the completion of the project, I worried that my role might make workers feel uncomfortable.

Research Setting

Conducting research in the rural highlands of Ecuador provided a beautiful setting, but also made for some interesting challenges in locating participants' homes, as described above. Additionally, there were safety concerns associated with being in many of these communities after dark, particularly for a 'gringa.' At times we could not find a driver who was willing to stay with us after dark in certain communities because there had been several taxi drivers murdered in these areas recently. There were times when both Jose and I felt very uncomfortable walking around certain communities at night. On occasion we were left stranded by the side of a busy road at night, waiting for the local bus that just happened to not come, or looking for a taxi that was nowhere to be found. While we were lucky to avoid any safety complications, I was always aware that there were certain risks associated with being in these areas at the times when we were, and took steps to avoid those risks as time went on.

Research Issues

The nature of fieldwork includes many emotional strains – both positive and negative. Pollner and Emerson (1983:235) describe the range of emotions common among field researchers: “on many levels, the actual conduct of field research reveals a chronic tension between the demands of involvement and withdrawal, of participation and detachment.”

Throughout the research process I battled times of sickness and loneliness – during these times it was especially difficult to complete interviews. Living and working in a different culture and speaking a foreign language can make one feel isolated and alone. Trying to balance the research project and my own emotional well-being was a constant challenge.

Some of the interviews were also emotionally charged as people were very heated and upset about their difficult situation at work. I found these interviews emotionally challenging for myself as well, knowing that these participants were dealing with some very challenging circumstances, and feeling helpless to improve their situation.

The most predominant emotions I felt were on the other end of the continuum. I was constantly humbled by the generosity I was shown from participants and people all around me. Daily I was granted the privilege of entrée into people's homes and into their lives – I was invited to parties, important events and felt trusted as if I was a member of their families. Workers not only invited me into their private family homes, but they often insisted that I stay for dinner or agree to come back and spend more time with their family.

I was surrounded by loving and gracious people who were willing to go out of their way to help me in any way possible. Participants would often offer me their assistance in locating their co-workers and friends – they offered me rides on motorcycles, walked out of their way to a neighbor's house, made phone calls and introduced me to their co-workers. Even after a long and strenuous day of work, people were still willing to sit with me in their homes and share their stories, often times revealing things that required them to be emotionally vulnerable.

CHAPTER V
THE WORKER COMMITTEE: ON THE GROUND CHALLENGES AND
POTENTIAL

The worker committee is a democratically elected group within the farm, comprised of one representative from each work area (i.e. postharvest, fumigation etc.). The committee includes a position for president, vice president, secretary and other elected positions. Compliance with fair trade requires that upper level management and committee representatives meet every other month to address workers' concerns. Certification requirements include workshops and trainings to educate workers on their rights according to fair trade regulations. There are workshops for all employees and distinct training sessions for members of the worker committees.

As workers explained, the committee is designed to deal with low-level issues such as asking for new uniforms, requesting different food in the cafeteria, or dealing with shop floor conflict between workers or between a worker and supervisor. The committee's power falls within the realm of a consultative body – workers are allowed to express their opinions, but management is not obligated to make changes based on their concerns. The worker committee is not designed to deal with higher-level issues such as wages and the way that production is handled on the farm. Workers are encouraged to express their voice on certain issues through a grievance system that resembles a due process system within the unionized workplace. This section explores the capacity of the worker committee at providing workers voice, representation and communication with

management. It asks to what extent these processes empower workers through the worker committee's power to influence real change within the farm. To unveil the complexity of this question, it is important to discuss the daily experiences and perspectives of both management and workers in order to address how the pressure to rationalize production influences the effectiveness of the worker committee. A brief explanation of farm-level stratification deepens our understanding of the social dynamics that influence the actors involved.

FARM-LEVEL STRATIFICATION

Three strata are identified on flower plantations. The top strata include upper-level management positions such as the owners and managers who have the greatest influence in decision-making and control within the farm. This group experiences pressure from importers, consumer demand, industry groups and certification requirements to produce a quality product. The next group within the farm is the middle strata, which include supervisors and lower-level management positions who deal directly with upper-level management and workers. Those in the middle strata ensure that everything on the farm operates efficiently. This group deals with the pressure from upper-level management to maintain high levels of productivity, but deals directly with workers from whom they depend upon for their output of labor. The bottom strata include workers who deal with the pressure from their supervisors and mid-level managers to increase productivity.

UPPER-LEVEL MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE: SURVIVAL IN A RATIONAL MARKETPLACE

From upper-level management perspective, operating a successful flower farm is not an easy task. Demand for flowers in the international market has declined dramatically in recent years, making survival in this industry an increasingly risky and stressful endeavor.

One flower owner noted that in the last year alone 500 hectares of what were once active flower farms have gone out of business, translating to nearly 7,000 lost jobs (NSF interview). In the Cayambe region, the devastation to this industry is evident in the abandoned greenhouses that scatter the countryside; a reminder of what was once an economic powerhouse.

Historically, the industry has gained a reputation for negative social and environmental ramifications. As discussed in Chapter II, local and international scrutiny has helped draw attention to the social and environmental ills, spurring the industry to make some significant changes. Flower owners have struggled to redefine the industry's international image, as all farms regardless of their practices, have been impacted by negative attention (Thesis Interview #1).

Owners are especially sensitive to their image and strive to obtain expensive certifications to distinguish their practices as socially and environmentally responsible, hoping to gain a competitive edge in an international market that now favors ethical consumerism. Farms that can afford a third party environmental and/or social certification gain a competitive edge through their access to a niche market. Fair trade is

the most demanding of these certifications, but also provides the potential for the most profit.

From upper-level management perspective, the incentive to obtain Fair Trade certification is primarily economic. Certified farms are granted access to a particular market that pays a higher price for flowers and is better insulated from instability. Fair Trade distinguishes certain farms from their conventional counterparts, for it is only a select few that have the capital and infrastructure necessary to comply with regulations.

But access to this market comes at a cost. As flower growers expressed, compliance with fair trade standards is a constant challenge and requires a significant economic investment (NSF data). Fair Trade certification first mandates compliance with national labor law. New legislation has made the cost of labor more expensive, and from producers' perspective, the law makes it more challenging to compete against countries with fewer regulations.

The nature of flower production is a particularly time sensitive and labor intensive operation, making the mandated limitations on hours worked an additional challenge in operating a profitable business. Production depends on the continuous and efficient harvesting, packaging and exporting of flowers to their destination in perfect condition. Survival depends on meeting consumers' demand for the perfect rose.

During periods of peak demand in the Global North, such as Valentine's Day or Mother's Day, farms dramatically increase production, requiring workers to work overtime for several weeks in a row. The pressure to produce during these periods is greatest and the imposed limitation on hours worked makes production more complicated and expensive than it was prior to the passage of the labor law.

FLO regulations on pesticides are another area where management is expected to invest more time and money. Flower farms use the least toxic chemicals possible, are required to recycle and compost, collect water, provide workers with adequate uniforms and trainings on exposure. While management acknowledges the need for these restrictions, they do require an additional investment in time and money to impose.

In addition to these requirements, Fair Trade flower farms provide lunch, transportation, medical exams, a psychologist and daycare centers for their employees. They provide leadership workshops and training sessions for committee members and regular employees on workers' rights. They also help implement the social projects that workers elect through the premium. Additionally, management is expected to maintain the worker committees within the farm that require specific infrastructure and time to develop.

MID-LEVEL MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE: PRESSURE FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

It is argued that supervisors and mid-level management positions often deal with a double burden of responsibility within the farm. This group absorbs the pressure from upper-level management to increase productivity, and is expected to get the high level of output from the workforce. Supervisors interact daily with workers and play the position of watchdog, ensuring that workers meet their daily quotas. The most common site of shop floor conflict is between supervisors and workers. Some supervisors have moved up the ranks, promoted from regular workers to the role of supervisor. One supervisor interviewed for this study complained that he no longer is included on meetings held by workers. He was bothered by the fact that as a supervisor he was not allowed access to

worker meetings related to the worker committee. As a supervisor he does not share the same pay, benefits, authority or camaraderie with upper-level management, and yet he is not allowed to serve as a worker representative on the committee, nor does he share social camaraderie with regular workers either.

Mid-level managers are in a similar position. Each year management coordinates an annual conference for all committee members from Fair Trade certified farms in Ecuador to discuss problems and leadership issues. Fair Trade certified farms have created a full-time, mid-level management position responsible for making sure that the farm is in compliance with regulations. Much of this person's responsibility is to make sure that the worker committees are in place and functioning according to regulations. This job includes interaction with upper-level management and workers. A typical day for this position is emblematic in many ways of the challenges faced by mid-level management.

A Typical Day

A typical day for Jimena begins at 5am when she wakes to get ready for work. She shares a bed with her 4 year-old daughter, who get up with her at this time. Jimena gets ready quietly so as not to wake her teenage daughter who is asleep in the room next door, and makes sure the young daughter is engaged with an activity before she leaves for work. She is comforted knowing that in a couple hours her elderly mother will arrive to take care of her youngest, and make sure the teenager gets out the door for school on time. But she worries about her daughter walking to school alone.

At work Jimena's day is hectic and stressed. She is preparing for a FLO auditor who will be coming in a couple weeks. It is her responsibility to make sure that

everything is in order on the farm; that the workers have new uniforms and know their responsibilities, that committee members are prepared for group interviews where they will need to talk about their ongoing projects, and that everything is clean and in its place. She has meetings with upper-level management to discuss the farm's compliance. She has meetings with committee members to discuss their roles. She knows the importance of passing the audit, and worries that if something goes wrong, everyone will be upset.

She is also planning the annual worker committee gathering where members from all 8 Fair Trade certified farms will meet in Quito for a 2 day workshop. This is a big responsibility and requires a lot of organizing schedules and arranging for all of the practical details like food, transportation, lodging and a guest speaker. Most of her day is spent running from one meeting to the next. Given her position between upper-level management and regular workers, she deals with both of their concerns, pressures and complaints.

She worries about her kids all day – wondering if her teenager made it to her parents' house safely after school, and thinking about what her younger daughter is doing. She wishes that she could attend her teenage daughter's even at school, but knows that tonight she will have to work late. Her workday finally ends at 8:00pm. She catches a ride with a co-worker to her parents' home where she will collect her daughters and head home. At home she fixes a quick dinner, talks with her 4 year-old about her day and looks over her teenage daughter's homework before going to bed.

Balancing Act

A typical day for Jimena helps illustrate the challenges of being a mid-level manager in the flower industry. Similar to the regular workers on the farm, Jimena

worries about her children and deals with a great deal of stress related to her work. She is caught in a position, not unlike all workers, where she depends on her salary in order to provide for her children - but also spends so much time at work that she misses out on time with her kids.

At work she must deal with the pressure of keeping the farm compliant with regulations, keeping both upper-level management and the workers in line with expectations. One manager explains how the pressure to comply with FLO standards, meet the demands for production and provide workers with the conditions and benefits they request is often a very delicate balancing act. She describes feeling at times that it is not possible to find equilibrium in the midst of this challenge (NSF Interview).

WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE: THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF WORK ON A FAIR TRADE FARM

From workers' perspective, Fair Trade certification has made a difference in their lives, particularly with the help of the social premium. The premium is used for projects that benefit all of the workers. For example, the farms in this study were in the midst of several projects; there was talk of building a sub-development of homes for the workers, and at one farm the workers were given a monthly food basket. All four farms observed offered workers low interest loans, which they used to buy a home or a car, or to start their own business.

Nearly all workers interviewed for the study agreed that certification provided them many benefits through the premium and had helped to make positive changes within the farm. The general consensus, from workers' perspective, was that work on a certified farm is notably better than on an uncertified farm, and that the seal allowed the

farm more stability from the risk of closure. More stability for the farm translates to more job security for the workers. One worker noted:

It would not be as it is right now - the farm would not be the same (without certification). It would totally change. Based on my understanding, through the seals it has a lot. The farm without seals is not as good of a farm. There are other farms that have never had seals and have closed (Thesis Interview #4).

Another worker who has been employed by the same farm for eighteen years described the transformation she has seen in the farm over the years, pre and post certification, referring to specific benefits granted to workers:

Of course the farm has changed very much in care and in uniforms. Before it was different. We didn't have loans, daycare, the computer center, a doctor or the food basket. It was our monthly wage and nothing more. (Thesis Interview #2)

Another worker who also serves as a committee member explains:

Without certification there would not be freedom of association. Because it is through FLO regulations the farm has to create the worker committees (Thesis Interview #5).

A Typical Day

Although fair trade certification has helped working conditions and provided workers additional benefits through the premium, there are still many challenges for workers on fair trade farms. A typical day for Angela, a single mother of two, is a perfect illustration of the challenges associated with work in the flower industry; particularly for women. Angela begins her day at 4am. Each morning before work she spends nearly two hours cleaning her children's clothes, preparing breakfast and getting them ready for school. She leaves shortly before 6am to catch the bus to work, well before her children start their journey to school. She worries about her kids from the moment she leaves the house, wondering if they made it to school safely. Angela works in post-harvest, which

means that particularly during periods of peak demand, her hours are long and unpredictable. Her job requires her to move quickly and repetitively, bunching and wrapping flowers into a bouquet, then placing them on a conveyor belt. Angela is under constant pressure to meet her daily goal of flowers bunched and hates being yelled at by her supervisor for not working fast enough. She gets off work after dark and starts the journey home, exhausted and worried about her kids who are at home alone and hungry. Once at home she prepares dinner for the children and looks over their homework before putting them to bed. Her greatest concern with having this type of job is that “now there is little time for the kids” (NSF Interview).

Economic Insecurity

Angela’s experience sheds light on the complicated situation workers face. They are caught in a precarious balance of needing a salary to provide for their children financially; but because of their job, feeling unable to support them the way they would like to as parents.

Work in the flower industry provides a steady income, yet most workers claim that the pay is “not sufficient” for their families to “move ahead” (NSF Interview). Even with a recent increase to minimum wage in national legislation, most families claim that they are living from paycheck to paycheck. Many claim that their salary pays for food and education for the kids and nothing more. One illness or emergency could push them over the edge into extreme poverty. Families in the industry, though better off than they were without a steady income in flowers, are still in a vulnerable position.

Occupational Health

Another concern for workers is the fear of pesticide exposure. Although national labor codes and certification standards call for the regulation of pesticide use and adequate worker protection, traditionally these have not been enforced within the flower sector. Cut-flowers are a perishable luxury good requiring heavy investment in greenhouse production, fertilizers, agro-chemicals and pesticides - all products which put workers who administer these products, communities and the environment who deal with their runoff into local water systems, at serious risk.

On Fair Trade Certified farms there are regulations in place to mitigate exposure and limit the types of chemicals permitted to only “green label” products that are least toxic. The extent to which these are monitored on certified farms is beyond the scope of this research project, but the perceived threat is very real to workers. Workers in this study often cite their fear of pesticide exposure, and note examples of friends and family members who had gotten sick from work with chemicals, or proximity to farms that use large amount of chemicals. Some workers cite pressure to enter greenhouses after fumigation (putting them at higher risk of exposure). They also worry about inadequate uniforms (Thesis Interview #7).

Although the worker committee offers workers a chance to voice certain grievances that pertain to a better work environment, many of their challenges stem from the pressure associated with the quota system and inadequate compensation; issues that the committee is not designed or capable of addressing with management. The following section explores how workers perceive of the actual benefits that come from the worker committee.

WORKER COMMITTEE: A FORUM FOR CONSULTATION, COMMUNICATION AND REPRESENTATION

The required meetings between worker representatives and managers ensure that the institutional space for dialogue and communication remains open. Workers' ability to utilize this mechanism to express their voice on certain issues relies on their knowledge of how the committees are intended to work. This knowledge comes from trainings and workshops provided by management to promote leadership, representation and workers' rights.

On the four farms visited for this study, knowledge of the worker committees, their respective roles and the formal process of airing grievances seemed to be common knowledge for workers. The formal process includes a chain of command for workers to bring a complaint to management, mediated by the worker committee.

Many workers noted the importance of the training sessions in providing a better understanding of their rights. Byron, a regular employee describes his experience with the training sessions by saying that "after we have been through the trainings, we have the words to talk. Whatever happens in the farm, we can bring our complaints to the committee" (NSF Interview).

The training workshops set into motion certain expectations of what representation means for workers on fair trade farms; expectations that we might assume are unique to workers on these farms. The worker committee is intended to serve as the intermediary between workers and management, best illustrated by Anita, a member of the worker committee at Farm X, where it seems to function well in providing workers access to management for their concerns to be heard:

If there is a problem they can go through the process of complaints and bring it to the committee, and then go to human resources, and if they don't solve it there, go to management through the worker committee (Thesis Interview #6).

Nearly all workers shared knowledge about the “process of complaints”, or the chain of people they were expected to talk to in case of a grievance or problem. While workers value the importance of the committee's ability to communicate with management, there is a limit to the types of problems and complaints the committee is designed to deal with. To reiterate, workers cite the committee's role in dealing with social issues on the farm, such as disputes between co-workers, or between a worker and a supervisor. Additionally, the committee deals with concerns related to quality of food provided at lunch or requesting new uniforms. One committee member, Jose, acknowledged:

Without the worker committee there would be no agreements with management. More than anything, it gives the opportunity for communication between the workers and management (Thesis Interview #5).

Similarly, a committee member at Farm Y notes: “without the committee there would be no projects and there would be no voice for the people. It would simply be like any other job” (Thesis Interview).

Power of Consultation

One way to measure representation is in workers' ability to influence management through the worker committee. Knowledge of how the worker committee is intended to represent workers creates expectations – how these expectations are met depends on workers' power to influence management. Workers that could offer an example of how the committee had successfully consulted with management on behalf of their interest typically had faith in the committee's ability to facilitate representation.

For example, Anita notes:

Before we didn't have loans, but we negotiated for money from FLO and lower interest rates. We talked with them (management) and now the interest is lower. This is what the worker committee does (Thesis Interview #6).

As a member of the worker committee, Anita knows first hand how consultations are handled on the farm. Believing that management is open and willing to respond to the committee has instilled confidence in the power of the worker committees: "I believe the committees benefit everyone" (Thesis Interview #6).

Other workers at Farm X expressed similar belief in the worker committees.

When I asked if she felt represented by the worker committee and had the ability to voice complaints, one regular worker named Gabi responded: Yes, they represent us and fight to earn things. We can talk to management and to members of the committee. They find solutions" (NSF Interview). Vera offered an example of when she first joined the farm and had a co-worker with problems with domestic abuse. Her co-worker was able to go to the committee and then they went with her to management to help sort out the problem. She noted "you can talk to the worker committee and if they don't know how to help you then you go to a supervisor and then up higher" (NSF Interview). Javier, another worker from Farm X says:

Yes I feel represented by them (the committee members). They help us if we have problems... sometimes there are problems between workers, or if we ask for uniforms... whatever necessity or complaint in the farm. For example, we asked for shoes and got them (NSF Interview).

While the worker committee sets up the institutional space for workers to communicate with management, many workers express their disillusionment with its ability to provide the right environment to do so. When workers feel they cannot freely

communicate with management, or when they have examples of failed attempts at consultation, they lose faith in the committee's effectiveness.

For example, during the course of my fieldwork one of the farms was in the process of consultation between committee members and upper-level management over a low-level issue. Many workers at this farm expressed concern about this specific issue that impacted their daily experience at work. The process of communicating their grievances with management and consulting over the outcome had become widespread knowledge and concern for both regular workers and committee members alike. Ultimately upper-level management considered the input of the worker committee, but decided not to incorporate their views by changing this issue within the farm. The result of this particular case was that regular workers and committee members expressed frustration with their work environment and disenchantment with the process of consultation. In this example committee members felt powerless to influence change – a reminder of the fact that the worker committee is designed to consult on certain issues and that in the end decision-making power resides with management.

Generally speaking, an important distinction can be drawn between the perceptions of regular workers and worker representatives on the committees. As Manuel, a committee member at Farm X explains: "If I hadn't been a member of the worker committee, I wouldn't know anything" (NSF Interview). Another committee member says, "after we have been through the trainings, we have the words to talk. Whatever happens in the farm, we can bring our complaints to the committee" (NSF Interview).

Committee members have experience working directly with management on certain issues within the farm, creating a sense of alignment or orientation with the challenges management faces. For example, Paul, a member of the committee explains a situation where she has had difficulty working with a particular manager on the farm. She describes him as being resistant to their suggestions and unwilling to cooperate. But, as a member of the committee, she recognizes her job is to “continue adjusting, perhaps continue getting to know him” so that they can build trust and come to agreements (Thesis Interview). Rather than be disenchanted with the entire process of communication, Juliana expresses a desire to keep working to communicate with management.

For committee representatives who have had experience working with management, there is a stronger sense of representation and dialogue. As Jose, A member of the worker committee at Farm Y explains:

More than anything there is an opportunity for communication between the committee and management. But the farm is open for all of the workers. All of them can take whatever problem to the owner – a regular worker could go right now to talk directly to upper-level management (Thesis Interview #5).

From regular workers’ perspective however, there is considerable fear associated with speaking to management. Part of this sentiment is tied to the historical context and the inherent power inequities between workers and management. Jose continues to explain why regular workers are hesitant to bring forward their complaints. He notes that people in this region have “always been repressed” and that rather than risk the work that enables their livelihood, they say: “it is better that I stay quiet and keep working like so” (Thesis Interview #5).

As a member of the committee, Jose says that he and his fellow committee members have tried to encourage regular workers to voice their concerns: “I tell them to talk. I tell them here is their opportunity because everyone has a chance to talk and to influence things, to make things happen that you want. But they don’t talk” (Thesis Interview #5). Paula echoes the same concern. She notes that as a representative:

It is our job to express the concerns of the workers and say what should be done. For example, in postharvest they may need something but sometimes they do not express it. They do not say ‘this is what we need.’ They feel it is better to remain quiet. But I believe as committee members we are able to say many things that the rest of the workers cannot say (Thesis Interview #8).

For regular workers who have not had the experience working with management, and are not in an elected position to do so, there is fear associated with bringing forth a complaint to management. Some workers note their fear of a supervisor getting angry and yelling, while others cite fear of losing one’s job, position in the farm, or having the bonus or even fair trade certification taken away. Rosa illustrates this point by referring to the fear associated with talking to management about claiming the accurate amount of hours worked in overtime:

People are scared to claim their money, to go and talk. They are afraid of the supervisor because he gets upset. It bothers him when someone reclaims... they take away peoples’ bonus and food basket. They can’t talk, they are very afraid of the engineer (Thesis Interview #3).

In reference to talking with management about an issue at work, Carmen states: “the whole world is afraid they will be fired” (Thesis Interview #2).

Omar reiterates the fear associated with speaking to management about a complaint. He complains that at work there are problems with the uniforms, but that he and his co-workers are unwilling to bring forth their complaints:

I run the risk of losing my position if I talk just for myself and people don't want to say anything. For instance, I am talking with the fumigators (about a problem) and they all say 'yes, yes let's go talk' and the moment we go to talk they won't come. Why? Timidity. They are afraid. It produces cancer in them the moment they need to talk. Of course there is more risk. I also become a scared chicken when I have to talk (Thesis Interview #7).

The issue of fear is also present for some committee members. One member, Javier was upset about a situation at work where he felt that supervisors were recording workers' hours inaccurately. Even in his position as a representative in the worker committee, his comments illustrate how perceived risks of reprisal are deeply intertwined with the precarious nature of workers in this region. It is their livelihoods and families at stake and keeping one's job is the priority. Javier states:

Who is going to talk with the owner? The day that I have a date with the owner is the day that I'm outside. Fear I don't have. But this house is rented and my daughter studies here. If they let me go from work tomorrow where do I go so my daughter can study? The need for work, work that is close, is everything (Thesis Interview #4).

The fear that workers have in voicing a grievance may reflect the limited power in consultation as a form of social dialogue, but also points to the potential positive influence that the worker committee could serve as an intermediary on certain issues.

From the perspective of many workers however, there is a breakdown in communication between workers and representatives. Workers complain about representatives who are not willing or able to express their concerns. When negotiations fail, or when grievances are not brought forth to management, workers become disillusioned with the role of the worker committee.

Omar expresses his discontent with the worker committee, which he feels is "very much manipulated by the engineer" (Thesis Interview #7). When Omar asked the committee to voice a complaint related to inadequate uniforms for fumigation, he claims

that the president refused to bring the complaint to management. The president's reason was that it was useless to bring forward a complaint to the engineer because he would not be willing to cooperate. Omar expressed his frustration with the committee by saying: "I am a worker, I am supposed to talk with the committee and they are supposed to talk directly with the owners, but they don't talk" (Thesis interview #7).

Omar relayed his disappointment with committee members by saying: "they are in charge of the well-being of the workers, but they really only do what the owners want them to do. Because they are scared, they are quiet, they are manipulated" (Thesis Interview #7).

Worker/Management Relationship

The relationship between workers and both levels of management is vital component to the overall atmosphere of the farm, as well as the committee members' ability to communicate. Naturally, the committee's potential to influence the decision-making process relies on upper-level management's willingness to consult and make changes in favor of worker input. At Farm X the atmosphere between workers and upper-level management seemed open and positive. There were still complaints about certain supervisors and examples of occasional conflict, but the overall environment was positive from workers' perspectives. The tone for this relationship is modeled first by the owner. Miguel notes: "We can talk directly to the owner. The owner listens." Miriam echoes, "the owner is really open to listen" (NSF Interview).

Many workers at Farm X give examples of the owner being present at the farm, greeting workers by name. Most described him as a good man, and someone who they respected. The atmosphere he helped to create allowed most workers to feel that there

was no fear associated with talking to management or the committee because “they are good people” and that with the help of communication between management and the committee, “we don’t need anything” (NSF Interview). Several workers described the owner as someone who would fight for the interests of the workers, even if it meant going against the opinion of managers.

During my interview with a manager at Farm X, she explained what made the farm a positive environment for workers. She said:

What makes a difference is the philosophy here. There has always been good contact where people can talk and solve their problems. It begins with the owners. They allow for openness to find a solution. They aren’t solving the problem alone, but find a solution for everyone. When FLO came, they incorporated the seal, but brought a philosophy that already existed here (Thesis Interview #19).

The tone that upper-level management creates within the farm has implications for how lower-level management interacts with workers and deals with stress. On all of the farms however, workers voiced complaints about their relationship with area supervisors, impacting the overall work environment and workers’ ability to utilize the worker committee effectively.

Supervisors and mid-level managers play a more direct and daily role in the lives of workers and often these interactions are a source of tension. The greatest source of tension emerges from the productivity system. The responsibility of supervisors is to monitor productivity and demand more from workers – a role that lends itself to high-pressure.

Supervisors absorb pressure from upper-level management demanding a high-quality flower that is ready to export in perfect condition. This pressure is then transferred to workers. As discussed above, workers cite supervisors’ treatment as their

biggest problem. This relationship can put a strain on working conditions and inhibit workers' ability to voice their concerns with management.

Workers cite examples of supervisors that treat them well, or at least individuals that are an improvement from previous supervisors, but these examples are the minority.

One worker, Nelly, described a conflict with a specific supervisor and the fear she felt in bringing forth a complaint to upper-level management. Even as a member of the joint body, where she has had experience and workshops that deal with speaking to management, it took her a long time to gain the courage to voice her concern.

Eventually she did bring her concerns to human resources and she was moved to another work area so that she wouldn't have to work with this particular supervisor. Her problem was dealt with quickly, and a solution was found to meet her individual concern.

The nature between supervisors and workers lends itself to tension. Supervisors are expected to get workers to meet their daily quota during the regular hours of work. They are also required to log workers' hours so as to be in compliance with FLO regulations. Workers feel the constant pressure of needing to produce more quickly, and feel jaded when they do not receive overtime compensation for hours beyond the workday to complete their quota. Upper-level management typically resolves conflicts informally. Sometimes the committee is involved.

Paula, a worker at Farm Z recalled a story that provides an example of how management can deal with the issue of supervisor/worker conflict. A certain supervisor on this farm has a reputation among workers for his temper. Over time complaints were voiced and a group of workers approached management with an ultimatum; either the supervisor would have to go, or the workers were going to quit. To resolve this issue, the

owner mediated the situation with a compromise – he talked with the area supervisor about his behavior, which according to the worker interviewed here, improved dramatically after this event. However, over time his temperament began to revert back, and others on the farm complained about his poor treatment during this study.

Belief in Fair Trade’s Accountability

The level of belief in Fair Trade’s accountability is another significant theme that emerged from the data. A notable difference can again be drawn between regular workers and committee members in the way they view the process of FLO audits. Compliance with fair trade certification is an important challenge for both levels of management and workers. Maintaining certification can involve a high level of pressure, particularly during the time of formal audits.

Each year a FLO representative visits certified farms to conduct a formal audit of the farm’s compliance with regulations. During the course of my fieldwork I was around several of the farms in the days preceding a FLO auditor’s visit. Even from outside the gates, where I waited for workers to get off work, I could see little changes occur as each farm made the final push to have everything in compliance. Just inside the gate stood an announcement board that was typically bare. Before the visit, it had been transformed to a board full of lists of rules and recommendations for workers. Workers that I spoke with during this time mentioned FLO’s visit, along with new uniforms they were given to wear during the audit and the nervous energy that accompanied the 3-day process. In preparation for the auditor’s visit, management makes sure to present the best possible image of the farm. Non-conformity puts certification at risk and workers and managers agree that maintaining certification is their goal.

For some regular workers, there is distrust in the Fair Trade auditing process. Several regular workers expressed disappointment with how the auditing is handled by management. A common grievance among workers at several of the farms was that when FLO visits, only certain workers are chosen to talk with the auditors. Anita claims: “they pick the type of people who get the bonus”, or the type of worker who does not complain. Several workers claimed that they had been sent on vacation during times when FLO auditors were scheduled to visit the farm, noting that because of their outspokenness, management did not trust them to be present during the audit. Others claimed that they could not be fully honest with FLO auditors because they were always questioned in the presence of management. Others say that they have to sign documents indicating the number of hours worked and overtime compensated. The hours are not always accurate, from workers’ perspective, but are adjusted in order to comply with FLO regulations.

When workers feel that they do not have a voice in this process, coupled with frustration over their level of representation, they lose faith in Fair Trade’s legitimacy and the worker committee. For instance, Omar notes that from his perspective the role of the worker committee is “to comply with the aspects of FLO, nothing more” (Thesis Interview #7).

For committee members, the auditing process is typically described differently.

Anita, describes this process as such:

Every year the auditors come. They ask all of the people, in the cafeteria one by one. The supervisors aren’t there. They have a meeting and people from each area are there and they ask how are the uniforms, how is the treatment of the people, the food, everything. And people have to say. Do they pay overtime, how many hours worked, for Valentine’s Day do you stay at night?

In response to a question about workers' ability to voice complaints, she said: "Yes, they can talk without fear" (Thesis Interview #6).

Paula also orients herself with the wellbeing of the farm, and with the ultimate goal of maintaining certification. From her perspective, the greatest challenge for the farm and the worker committees is making sure they are in compliance with certification. The greatest risk would be in losing the certification. It is particularly important that workers come together with management to present the farm's best face when auditors are present. She has encouraged her co-workers to bring forward their complaints, but to do so before the FLO audits. The most important thing is compliance. She says:

When the auditors come the whole world is good. Terrible it would be if a person were to complain. We could lose the seal and it is very important to us because how it has helped us with many things. Losing the seal would mean losing the benefits (Thesis Interview #8).

Paula goes on to acknowledge that although it is difficult to express oneself, the workers need to keep working hard, because: "The faster we go, the better. With better quality the farm moves ahead and the profit is better. What is best for the farm is best for the owner, and for everyone" (Thesis Interview #8).

Javier also orients with the well-being of the farm and seems to sympathize with management's challenge to maintain certification. Although he is willing to criticize the role of the worker committee and its limited level of influence, as a representative he acknowledges: "One learns and understands how to manage. Each day I am learning more through the trainings." He goes on to note:

We work with this force and with the same spirit for each day maintaining the quality. Quality ultimately that is maintaining the social part, the benefits and everything. You have to fight. You have to fight day by day because if we leave here, everything that is given would be lost. So better that you continue fighting every day, as many of us as representatives of the committee, with all of the

members and move the farm forward as well- because if we weren't here, or the workers, the farm would close (Thesis Interview #4).

Worker Committee versus Union Representation

It is important to consider workers' alternatives in a discussion about representation. Workers acknowledge that union representation could be a more powerful form of influence than the worker committee. A regular worker says: "With a union there are more benefits. For instance, a union ensures that overtime is not obligatory" (Thesis Interview #1). Omar, another regular worker states: "I believe a union is stronger and has more power than the committee, because the committee sometimes is just a façade" (Thesis Interview #7).

However, workers also recognize that trade unions in this region are not necessarily a better alternative. Omar goes on to explain: "On the other hand, when they form a union here they throw people out on the street and leave them with nothing" (Thesis Interview #7). Union representation is a double-edged sword; while trade unions may have more power to cause real change within the workplace, they also come with some significant risks for workers and farms. Anita, a member of the worker committee, describes this dilemma:

Here in Cayambe there were a lot of unions in the past, but the union representatives sometimes lost. If there is a problem in the farm, a union begins to divide; it starts with the injustice and ends up with nothing. Nothing except waste your money. There are farms that have closed because of the unions. Nobody wants to be without work... I don't want to know anything about the union. (Thesis Interview #6)

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A key goal for the fair trade movement is to provide representation and empowerment for workers on large-scale enterprises. In Ecuador, the worker committee provides workers on certified plantations the institutional mechanism through which their grievances can be channeled to management. However, the ability of the worker committee to provide authentic representation and make significant improvements to the working conditions on large-scale enterprises is an ongoing challenge in the context of a rational workplace.

CHALLENGES IN A RATIONAL WORKPLACE

From an upper-level management perspective, it is difficult to find balance in a competitive industry. One owner explains that there are “three sides you have to listen to” (NSF Interview). You must be aware of the needs and expectations of the workers, while also ensuring that the farm is producing enough to survive, and all in compliance with FLO mandates. As owners and managers seem to agree, it is in the best interest of the farm to maintain the social aspects of certification. Keeping workers content translates to a stable and productive workforce. As one owner explains: “a worker that is happy will work better and harder for me” (NSF Interview).

The middle strata, including supervisors and mid-level management, do much of the heavy lifting within the farm. Supervisors serve as the watch-dog for shop-floor

productivity. They feel the pressure from upper-level management to make the operation run smoothly and efficiently and deal directly with conflicts and inefficiencies when they occur. From upper and middle management perspective, the need to increase efficiency requires constant pressure to produce more quickly.

For workers, it is acknowledged that work on a fair trade plantation is better than on an un-certified farm, particularly because of the social premium. Nonetheless, there are still many problems. The combination of occupational health issues, increasing pressure for productivity through the quota system, long hours and insufficient compensation are some of the many reasons that make the flower industry a difficult occupation.

The Worker Committee

The role of the worker committee is to provide workers the space to bring forth their grievances and concerns to management. However, it is not designed with the power to influence significant change within the farm. It is not designed to address the rationalized nature of production with its high-pressure quota system, long and unpredictable hours without overtime compensation, and the ongoing tension between supervisors and workers.

It is common for conflicts and problems that emerge on the farm to be dealt with quickly and on an individual basis, without disrupting productivity. When the worker committee is involved in the process, it is used to smooth out disputes and address low-level concerns to keep workers safe and content. Its power is limited to the consultation realm; ultimately management has decision-making authority. Nonetheless, findings demonstrate that the worker committee has served a meaningful role by increasing the

level of communication and dialogue between workers and management, with the potential to improve certain working conditions.

CONDITIONS FOR WORKER REPRESENTATION

Although the committee's influence is not designed to have negotiating power, its presence does allow a space for increased worker representation and communication with management. Three themes emerge from the data for how workers perceive representation as mediated by the worker committee: power of consultation, worker/management relationship and belief in Fair Trade's accountability.

An interesting distinction is drawn between regular workers and committee representatives. While both groups identify ways that representation could be improved, committee members tend to orient more with the well-being of the farm and seem more aligned with the challenges that management face. On the other hand, regular workers often are more disenchanted by the process and see the worker committee as less capable of causing real changes within the farm.

Committee members experience the process of negotiation and communication with management, voicing the concerns of their co-workers. They also receive a higher level of training. This seems to translate to a different and more nuanced understanding of representation. Additionally, this experience seems to stratify committee members from regular workers, situating them more in the mid-level strata within the farm.

Regular workers often associate committee members with the management, particularly when committee members are not willing or able to get results from voicing grievances on workers' behalf. Committee members talk from the perspective of management, seeking to get regular workers to trust in the grievances process, utilize the

channels of communication within the farm and put on their best behavior during FLO audits. Committee members express more confidence in the process of waging grievances, trust more in management's willingness to negotiate and ultimately align with the well-being of the farm and the goal of productivity. It seems that their experience as committee members, despite the fact that they may have serious complaints about working conditions and the power of the committee, has made them relate more to the challenges management face and committed to making the worker committees function smoothly. For some committee members, making the farm run smoothly and efficiently seems to be more important than addressing the concerns and problems that workers face. In this regard, the design of the worker committee may serve to further rationalize production by pacifying workers to the most problematic conditions that the committee cannot address.

On the other hand, regular workers who have not served as committee members seem more likely to become disillusioned by the process when faced with problems at work. They tend to see management through as "us versus them" lens and at times associate committee representatives with the management team. For regular workers, when a problem arises at work they feel less empowered to voice their concerns for fear of losing their job or being punished. When regular workers feel they cannot trust their committee representatives to voice concerns on their behalf, they become disillusioned with the process of complaints, the role of the worker committee and even fair trade certification.

For regular workers and committee members alike, representation is linked to the perception that management is open to consult and respond to workers' requests.

Conversely, when management is unwilling to compromise based on the committee's requests, the result is that both committee members and regular workers lose faith in the process and communication is halted. Although they are given the opportunity for representation, ultimately management decides whether or not to incorporate their concerns. As Danford et al. (2005:616) point out, when management's motives for creating partnership are embedded in "their short-termist strategic objectives of continually cutting costs and maximizing profitability", participation proves inauthentic and work environments are characterized by conflict and tension rather than cooperation.

On the other hand, when upper-level management is open and willing to listen to workers' concerns, the work environment is much more positive. It is important to note that management from all four farms visited for this study expressed an openness and willingness to work with the committee and listen to their workers concerns. There are many structural features that influence the stress-level within the farm. Certainly a farm's financial stability plays a vital role in management's willingness to agree to workers' requests, such as new uniforms or better food in the cafeteria. The overall stress-level at the different farms, the way that management interacts with workers and the workers' perception of their work environment are not independent from the farm's financial success. When conditions are good, it appears that workers are more likely to stay employed at the same farm, decreasing worker turnover and lowering the need for additional training costs and social security benefits.

For example, on Farm X where the conditions were most conducive to worker representation and empowerment, the rate of worker turnover is low, management is less economically strained to comply with workers' requests and is willing to cooperate with

their concerns about low-level issues. Overall, it is management that is committed to the philosophy of being open and cooperative with their workers. As the manager and owner from this farm attest, their commitment started long before obtaining certification.

An interesting theme that emerged from the data is workers' level of trust in fair trade certification. During the time of formal audits, workers and managers strive to make sure that everything is in compliance. Workers are situated in a difficult position, reflected by the difference in responses by regular workers and committee members. Workers agree that maintaining fair trade certification is very important, and so to risk the farm's compliance by voicing their concerns to FLO representatives is not a viable option. Several workers suggested that it would be helpful to have more opportunities away from their work environment where they could communicate through anonymous surveys.

This example reflects a broader challenge the movement faces in preserving its authenticity. As Fair Trade progresses as a movement and labeling initiative, it has become increasingly more bureaucratic and rational in nature, threatening its ability to provide authentic, face-to-face partnerships (Raynolds and Long 2007:18). As Raynolds and Long (2007:18) explain, Fair Trade relies on an independent certification system that depends on "increasingly formalized rules, standards, and product labeling procedures."

For the movement to remain sincere in its objective to provide workers representation and empowerment, it will be crucial to consider on-the-ground problems that influence all actors involved in large-scale enterprises. The Ecuadorian context provides insight to the challenges for providing representation and worker voice in the non-unionized sector. The greatest risk that threatens the worker committee's

authenticity is not unlike the challenge that faces the movement itself - to operate within the rational marketplace, but not become subsumed by its ideals. The worker committee's risk is that it will become an institutional mechanism that serves to pacify workers in order to further rationalize production.

This study demonstrates that the worker committee is limited in its ability to influence significant changes to working conditions within the farm (i.e. the nature of production through the quota system). In this sense, worker empowerment is a lofty goal. However, the worker committee certainly has opened the door for increased levels of representation, communication and dialogue between workers and managers – conditions that may help pave the road to increased empowerment.

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