

Post-agrarian aspirations: tourism and rural politics in Ecuador

Angus Lyall ^{a*}, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld^b and Joe Quick ^c

^aDepartment of Geography, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA; ^bDepartment of Anthropology, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA; ^cDepartment of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Waukesha, WI, USA

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study examines post-agrarian aspirations and rural politics in Ecuador. After decades of urban outmigration under a neoliberal agrarian order, many rural places have witnessed efforts to develop local tourism economies as a possibility to transcend stigmatised agrarian livelihoods and to (re)constitute communities. We build on anthropological studies of aspiration to explore how visions of post-agrarian futures are shifting the actors, scales and terms of rural politics in the present. Through two case studies, we observe how state actors have come to re-inscribe their role within post-agrarian imaginaries, partially rewriting the terms of state legitimacy in rural places.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude ethnographique examine les aspirations post-agraires et la politique rurale en Équateur. Après des décennies d'émigration urbaine sous un ordre agraire néolibéral, de nombreuses zones rurales sont le théâtre d'efforts visant à développer les économies touristiques locales pour transcender des modes de vie agraires stigmatisés et (re) constituer des communautés. Nous nous appuyons sur des études anthropologiques portant sur les aspirations pour explorer la manière dont les visions de l'avenir post-agraire agissent, au présent, sur les acteurs, les échelles et les paramètres politiques en milieu rural. À l'aide de deux études de cas, nous observons comment les acteurs étatiques ont reformulé leur rôle en fonction d'imaginaires post-agraires, modifiant partiellement les termes de la légitimité de l'État en zones rurales.

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Introduction

The 2007 election of President Rafael Correa in Ecuador corresponded with a boom in the price of oil, Ecuador's principal export. State revenues increased threefold and a modernising state renewed institutional commitments to stimulate tourism within its approach to rural development (SENPLADES 2009, 2013). Correa oversaw the construction of vast networks of new infrastructures (railways, highways, airports), boasting that tourists could have breakfast in the Amazon, lunch in the Andes and dinner on the coast. His regime decentralised

CONTACT Angus Lyall angusl@live.unc.edu

*Angus Lyall is currently a lecturer at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador

funds for tourism to provincial, municipal and parish governments (Bedón 2011), while also granting the Ministry of Tourism a central role in national planning (SENPLADES 2013). For many, such bold steps seemed to epitomise the “return of the state” (Villalba 2013) or a so-called post-neoliberal turn, following decades of neoliberal austerity (Acosta 2012). At the same time, support for the agrarian activities of smallholder farmers (as much as 40% of the population) was tentative and patchwork. Correa favoured a model of export-oriented, industrial agriculture, and dismissed the economic viability of smallholder farming, denying peasant demands for robust land and irrigation reforms, extension programmes and credits (Carrión and Herrera 2012; Clark 2017). Instead, he invited rural citizens to imagine post-agrarian futures, in which the children of peasant farmers might be engineers, architects, or tourism professionals. Since the end of the oil boom in 2014, many urban migrants have retreated from rising unemployment to their rural places of origin (Larrea 2016), where they have encountered familiar patterns of agrarian neglect. However, rather than fully reconnecting to agrarian production and politics, many pursue alternative futures through tourism initiatives (see also Bennike 2019, this special issue).

In this article, we argue for closer attention to how post-agrarian aspirations or visions of the future among rural subjects shape rural politics today. Critical agrarian studies have long tracked the contested forces of capitalist development in agrarian societies (Bernstein 2006; Borrás 2009; Byres 2009; Levien, Watts, and Hairong 2018), but they have largely sidestepped questions regarding the formation and effects of post-agrarian aspirations in rural places.¹ In the Ecuadorian context, researchers of agrarian change have tracked uneven distributions of resources across agroindustrial and peasant economies (Martínez Valle 2017; Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017) and changing forms of peasant dispossession, from conservation initiatives (Bravo and Moreano 2015) to land grabbing by North American retirees (Gascón 2016). Such research reveals the manifold, flexible ways in which capital accumulates in and through transformations in agrarian territories. However, the study of agrarian change in Ecuador tends to occlude other dimensions of rural life and, consequently, it struggles to account for the relative stability of state rule in territories of agrarian neglect.

This article builds on anthropological studies of aspiration to explore how imaginaries of post-agrarian futures shift the actors, scales and terms of rural politics. In the words of anthropologist Gina Crivello, “aspirations’ are about much more than abstract ‘futures’; they orient actions in the present” (2015, 39; see also Aguilar-Støen 2019; Appadurai 2004; Holloway, Brown, and Pimlott-Wilson 2009; Smith 2013). The rural subjects at the centre of this article aspire for tourism development to reconsolidate communities, following decades of outmigration under a neoliberal agrarian order. While research in youth geographies has explored relations between aspiration and migration towards urban centres (Bunnell 2019; Bunnell, Gillen, and Ho 2018; Gale and Parker 2015), our case studies speak to aspirations for reintegrated homes and communities in rural spaces.

We develop our analysis in three parts. First, we briefly discuss rural governance trends in Ecuador since the agrarian reforms of 1964 and 1973. The failures of these reforms for smallholder farmers spurred contentious rural politics over the distribution of agrarian resources and contributed to the growth of the indigenous movement, as an influential force in rural politics on a national scale. The reform failures also engendered economic stratification in rural communities (Martínez Valle and Martínez Godoy 2019), as well as rural–urban outmigration and experiences of social isolation among migrants in

urban centres. Second, we explore precisely how experiences of outmigration have shaped aspirations for community tourism today, as an alternative to the stigmatisation of agrarian livelihoods and the hardships of outmigration. We do so through ethnographic accounts of communities in the central Andes and northern Amazon. Third, we analyse the implications of post-agrarian aspirations in rural politics. Namely, in our research sites, we find that well-traveled, male children of peasant farmers have accumulated political capital in community assemblies; disengaged with regional agrarian organising; and diverted collective energies towards the consolidation of tourism businesses and direct relations with relevant state institutions. We do not register obvious or abrupt changes in rural economies, but rather tendential shifts in aspirations towards a tourism development that remains – to some extent – unrealised. In other words, few people in these places have either abandoned agriculture or live exclusively from tourism dollars; however, as community tourism initiatives multiply across Ecuador, these experiences do speak to significant transformations in rural organising and political articulations. We draw on ethnographic research conducted in the central Andes and northern Amazon during multiple field visits between 2013 and 2018, which included interviews, archival research, surveys and observation.²

Rural governance in modern Ecuador

In Ecuador, land reform slowly unfolded over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, and into the 1980s (Barsky 1980; Bretón 1997; Chiriboga 1988), facilitating peasant ownership of farmlands in the Andes and access to land titles for farmer-migrants in the Amazon. In the 1980s, the Ecuadorian state faced steeply rising international debt and enacted austerity measures that stalled agrarian development among peasants (Acosta 2001; Martínez Valle 2004). The 1994 Law of Agrarian Development (see Whitaker 1998) consolidated neoliberal financial and legal reforms and facilitated the growth of new export-oriented agroindustries, like cut flowers, broccoli and African Palm oil (Zapatta, Ruiz, and Brassel 2008; Lyall 2010; Martínez Valle 2017). Rural development institutions and programmes for peasant growers went underfunded (North 2003). Challenging economic conditions for smallholder farmers in the Andes, coupled with droughts in the southern Andes, contributed to farmer migration into the Amazon and the displacement of Amazonian indigenous groups (Iriarte de Aspuz 1980).

Scholars observe that the neglect of peasant farmers contributed to the fragmentation of the peasant movement in the Andes and on the coast (Kay 1995; Zamosc 2003), but it also propelled the articulation of indigenous communities into ethnic-based local and regional organisations. In 1986, indigenous organisations in the Andes and Amazon united as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), a nationwide movement that demanded cultural respect, bilingual education and legal and territorial autonomy (Becker 2010; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; García 2003; Pallares 2002), as well as more equitable access to agrarian resources such as land and irrigation water. CONAIE gained political clout through nationwide strikes in 1990 and 1994; it formed the political party Pachakutic in 1996; and it led the ouster of two neoliberal governments in 1997 and 2000. By the early 2000s, Pachakutic had achieved electoral successes at provincial and national levels (Martínez Novo 2004) and gained top positions within the government of Coronel Lucio Gutiérrez (2003–2005).

After Gutiérrez deepened unpopular neoliberal reforms, Rafael Correa rose to power on a wave of popular opposition to austerity in Ecuador and Latin America, more broadly (Yates and Bakker 2014). Public sector investments in infrastructure, healthcare, welfare programmes and education ushered in a period of economic and political stability (Lyll, Colloredo-Mansfeld, and Rousseau 2018). As of August 20, 2018, the World Bank website indicated that, under the Correa regime, Ecuador had witnessed an average decline in GDP of 4.3 per cent and a 15-point decline in poverty from 37.6–22.5 per cent. However, Correa’s government did little to change inequalities in the distribution of resources in agrarian territories (Carrión and Herrera 2012; Tilzey 2019). Ecuador remained one of the world’s most unequal countries in terms of land distribution (Berry et al. 2014) and widespread “water grabbing” complicated this scenario (Boelens, Gaybor, and Hendriks 2014). Correa weathered CONAIE-led protests in 2010 and 2011, insisting that land redistribution was equivalent to the “redistribution of poverty” (cited in Ponce and Acosta 2010, 1). Despite his revolutionary rhetoric, Correa held a PhD in development economics and his intellectual roots were firmly situated in neo-structural modernisation and reformist, neo-institutional economics, rather than in social movement activism. He worked to consolidate state legitimacy in rural spaces by investing in infrastructure, education and healthcare and by weaving relations between the central state, local governments and civil society through investments in tourism.

Around the turn of the century, community tourism had emerged as a core proposal of NGOs and local governments to manage rural unemployment (Coraggio et al. 2001), in the face of enduring inequalities in access to agrarian resources. Under Correa, the state continued to decentralise revenues for tourism development, but in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism, generating a direct relationship between the central state and local governments through tourism projects (Lyll 2011). The Ministry of Production began supporting local tourism initiatives and state banks opened lines of low-interest credit for community tourism. Among the government’s most emblematic infrastructure projects was a renovated Quito-to-Guayaquil train line with frequent stops to offer riders local artisan goods and cultural performances. In 2014, the country witnessed a 20 per cent jump in international visitors, compared with the first trimester of the previous year. The government deepened its commitment to tourism by purchasing the rights to a Beatles song and conducting an international advertising campaign called “All You Need is Ecuador”. In 2015, this campaign launched the first advertisement by a nation state on a Superbowl broadcast, a 30-second spot that cost US\$ 3,800,000.

Correa’s objective was to govern rural spaces by intimating a fast-track between agrarian livelihoods and alternative economic futures. Lenín Moreno, Correa’s vice-president in 2007–2013 and successor in 2017, is a former tourism agency owner and founding member of the Chamber of Tourism. As president, Moreno has distanced himself from Correa in the wake of a host of corruption scandals (Lyll 2018) and discontent related to falling oil prices and public spending (Lyll and Valdivia 2019); however, Moreno has renewed commitments to achieving rural development through tourism, declaring via Twitter that “Tourism is the core of our development in a post-oil era. An effective path towards generating employment. We are headed there!”

In this context, critical researchers have noted a gradual decline in agrarian politics. Some explain the fading of agrarian demands as an effect of CONAIE’s entrance into electoral politics and its tactical alignment with reformist NGOs and multilateral institutions

(Hidalgo 2013; Bretón 2015; Martínez Novo 2014). Others also cite the sway of Correa's populist discourse (Cerbino, Maluf, and Ramos 2017; De la Torre 2013) and his cooptation of the national peasant organisation, the National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations (FENOCIN), and of several provincial indigenous organisations (Ninahualpa 2018). However, such analyses centred on rural politics in the public and electoral spheres obscure other factors contributing to a decline in agrarian politics that are rooted in the everyday experiences of rural populations. For example, the conspicuous growth of the indigenous movement in the 1980s was paralleled by unprecedented rates of rural–urban migration among indigenous women and men (Bilsborrow et al. 1987; Chiriboga 1988). This migration contributed to the growth of precarious, informal urban economies (Waters 1997) and to stark material and symbolic inequalities for rural peoples in urban spaces. As the following case studies from communities in the Andes and Amazon suggest, experiences of social isolation and discrimination in cities contributed to the search for economic alternatives that might facilitate the (re)constitution of rural communities.

Tourism aspirations in the central Andes

The Andean community of Quilotoa is located at the heart of five of the poorest parishes in the country. The patchwork of small plots that spreads across the steep terrain of the region reflects a history of progressive fragmentation or *minifundización*, since land reform brought an end to the semi-feudal hacienda system in the 1970s. Agrarian reform granted legal titles to former peon families, but it also cut off peasants' access to water, pasture and other hacienda resources. In effect, it consolidated unfertile hillside lands among indigenous communities and fertile lands in the valleys among capitalist investors. The economic viability of hillside farms has continued to suffer from a lack of irrigation water and rapid soil erosion (Hess 1997; Sánchez-Parga 2002). The indigenous Kichwa families of Quilotoa have responded by relying on economic “pluriactivity” (Marsden 1990; Kay 2008) or “heterogeneity” (Martínez Valle 2017), combining household agricultural activities with informal commerce in cities or waged work on export-oriented agroindustrial plantations and in urban construction. Quilotoa residents often recall that by the 1990s, the larger peasant jurisdiction to which they belonged had lost much of its population to migration and was all but abandoned (Spanish *botado*) (Umajunga 1995).

However, Quilotoa features a 4,000-meter volcano with a three-kilometer-wide, turquoise lake in its crater. Guidebooks have touted the beautiful lake for years. Today, aspirations for community tourism development are often framed in contrast to the social isolation experienced in urban migration. Juan César Umajunga, now an active participant in parish-level politics, recounts his time in Quito before returning to form Quilotoa's first artisan organisation:

Before we formed this [organisation], we were all porters ... I was working by age eight and I was without a mother. I was still four or five years old – in diapers. So, I was struggling here, there ... a real street kid, right?

Recurrent themes in narratives of former migrants include isolation from social networks. A young painter recalls the alcohol-related death of a friend who migrated to Quito. “In

Quito”, he laments, “he left his wife abandoned in the street, selling some handicrafts. It is no way for a wife to live”. The “historical imprints” (Pribilsky 2013, 586) of such stories and experiences have shaped shared notions of what aspirations should be. Alfonso Latacunga, a founding member of Quilotoa’s tourism organisation, explains how these shared notions become expressed in communal spaces:

We have spoken in our meetings, telling young men and women not to migrate, but to look for work with the organisation itself, in the sector itself, in the community itself. We have always been clear, emphasising key advice that the youth should not leave to be robbed and damaged in the cities ...

By contrast, in reference to peers now working in tourism, Juan César says that “they succeeded and organised and they saved themselves from migration”. This emphasis on being organised speaks to how many adults aspire to reconstitute community after decades of outmigration.

We observe similar themes in the decisionmaking of Quilotoans, as they manage economic pressures, along with place-based social obligations and ties. For example, in 2003, Alfredo Pastuña moved down to a town near the provincial capital, where he began working for a cut-flower operation. He was promoted to run a work crew and was making US \$400 a month, well above what most in Quilotoans earn. But his older brother recruited him back to Quilotoa to manage the family hotel. In his early 30s, Alfredo traded the security of his supervisor position for reinsertion into family life. On breaks from shifts at the hotel, he hangs water jugs on the handlebars of a borrowed bike to care for a calf at his parents’ house. Pushing through the dense trees of his father’s overgrown windbreak, he finds himself fulfilling his identity as son, husband and father – albeit with less cash income and more risky investments of his own in tourism.

Several young Quilotoans have pursued tourism-related college degrees in the hope of making this livelihood more sustainable. Alfonso Latacunga, the father of one of them, explained in 2015 that the organisation wants professionally trained community members to return to Quilotoa to drive tourism growth and reintegrate the broader community. “Our dream”, he says, “is that our young people who have recently finished studying ... with a degree in accounting, a degree in [computer] systems, a degree in gastronomy, a degree in tourism – that they remain right here”.

In Quilotoa, we find imaginaries of a future rural-based and collective life in which mutual recognition might be secured in intimate social networks, in contrast to the isolating social conditions of urban migration. While researchers have shown the “community” or the “village” to be essentialised notions (for example, Lentz 2014), nonetheless these notions of place can also come to play important roles in the place-making aspirations of “villagers” themselves. In effect, through the pursuit of communal and family living that one resident refers to as life in “plenitude”, we see the partial emergence of a more integrated social space. This notion of plenitude does not refer to an agrarian ideal or to economic abundance, but rather to social connectedness.

As the significance of tourism grows in everyday life, so too does its importance in relations with the state. When the state established the Ilinizas Ecological Reserve in 1996, it designated Quilotoa lake and approximately 500 metres around it as part of the reserve and required all Quilotoans move their homes and businesses outside of this

boundary. Quilotoans resisted and reached out to the provincial indigenous organisation, the Indigenous and Peasant Movement of Cotopaxi (MICC), for support (Colloredo-Mansfeld et al. 2018). The state dispatched troops and Quilotoans responded by kidnapping a state official. MICC leaders brokered a compromise in which the state allowed Quilotoans to remain and delegated conservation responsibilities to them. Quilotoans continued to live within the reserve, while conserving the lake and surrounding lands. Quilotoans later renegotiated relations with the state under the Correa regime, as local leaders yielded much of the autonomy they had gained. In 2013, the local association became an affiliate of the Ministry of Tourism, as a so-called Center of Community Tourism (CTC), and it later re-registered with the Ministry of Competitiveness and Foreign Trade. Quilotoans ceded to the Ministry the right to appoint community officers, although aligning with the state was antithetical to the political project of the provincial indigenous movement. The Correa administration paved the last 12 kilometres up to the volcano, converting Quilotoa into a day trip for Quito residents. The Ministry of Tourism invested in targeted projects, as the community tourism organisation became the owner of a new artisan gallery that cost over US\$ 300,000. The Ministry also spent US\$ 117,000 on a *mirador* or scenic overlook on the crater rim. Still more funding went to a new plaza and parking area. The state hired consultants in hospitality services to run seminars on topics ranging from how to set a table to financial accounting. The Ministry put many local tourism workers on the state payroll, while also requiring that the community stop charging visitors entrance fees. However, after the Ministry of Tourism stopped paying salaries in 2014, relations with the state were once again renegotiated. Quilotoans began charging entry into the community and, in 2018, they barred the entrance of national park rangers. Thus, since 1996, a series of conflicts and negotiations with the state have drawn tourism development into the centre of the everyday political life of this agrarian community.

Tourism aspirations in the northern Amazon

In this article, we understand aspirations as cognitive imaginaries that orient actions in relation to perceived limitations such as institutional conjunctures, lessons from historical experience and social norms. They constitute a structured, pragmatic field of social practice. In this sense, we distinguish aspirations from desires or wishes, conceived of as unfettered cognitive imaginaries. While multiple analyses of agrarian politics have suggested that development institutions and discourses produce or cultivate the desires and, in turn, the political actions of rural subjects (Ferguson 1990; Li 2007; Mosse 2005; Van Teijlingen 2016), we find that the term “desire” can be misleading. Social actors rarely organise their plans and politics according to subjective desires, but rather act in ways that are deemed practical by networks of peers, as collectivities take into account perceived restrictions and opportunity structures (Fischer 2014).

In this section, we sketch the institutional relations, historical experiences and social norms that have positioned an indigenous Kichwa community of the northern Amazon to aspire to tourism development. Playas del Cuyabeno, also known as “Playas”, is a community of subsistence farmers, hunters and fisherpeople, located several hours downriver from the nearest road. We turn from Quilotoa in the central Andes to Playas, located at the

margins of market society, to underscore how similar experiences of urban migration have shaped aspirations for tourism across disparate agrarian sites.

Playas was formed in the late 1960s by families who aimed to build a school and formalise land claims before an onslaught of settlers arriving from the Andes in search of farmland and jobs in the growing oil industry (Cabodevilla 2004; Iriarte de Aspurz 1980). The state and oil companies built major highways into the Amazon in the 1970s and 1980s, opening paths for companies and farmer-settlers to occupy territories on which indigenous families depended for hunting, farming and fishing. Indigenous groups sought land titles and turned to cash crop agriculture, but *mestizo* settlers leveraged institutional biases in the Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC) to claim the most fertile lands (Iriarte de Aspurz 1980). Indigenous farmers have since struggled with poor, swampy soils (Little 1992); myriad pests and funguses that attack non-endemic cash crops; poor market access; and a lack of access to capital, processing equipment and crop collection centres (Davis et al. 2017). Playas' residents have witnessed further resource pressures since the state included this community in the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve in 1991, placing restrictions on hunting and fishing.

In the 1970s, young leaders in Playas allied with Capuchin missionaries to pursue land rights; they joined with the incipient Kichwa federation *Jatun Comuna Aguarico* (JCA), which included 30 Kichwa communities; and they later joined the provincial Federation of Organisations of the Kichwa Nationality of Sucumbíos (FONAKISE). However, in the face of ongoing territorial stresses and agrarian challenges, many of Playas' residents also migrated to work in oil exploration (Santos Ortiz de Villalba 1996), as well as mines, plantations and informal commerce in other regions. As in Quilotoa, many adult males abandoned the community for years at a time. In the 1990s, some returned to Playas to work on a floating hotel or "flotel" that belonged to investors from Quito. A tourism agency also hired 65 community members to build and manage a set of cabins. This rise of tourism helped to partially reconstitute families; however, paramilitary-related border violence at the turn of the century undermined business, leading some men and women to migrate in search of work.

Today, memories of outmigration among Playas' residents highlight experiences of isolation and exploitation in town and urban centres. A few narratives of teachers and barge operators underscore some success; yet, more often, former migrants describe precarious livelihoods, hunger, exhaustion and loneliness. In 2015, a young mother with two daughters lamented that she had to search for food in trash bins when she lived in the provincial capital, Nueva Loja. When she found work, it was taxing: "I worked in a restaurant ... My work hours were from five in the morning until five in the afternoon ... Oh, how dead I felt; I found peace coming back here". Other interviewees characterise social isolation specifically in terms of ethnic discrimination. Jessica, a 27-year-old pig farmer, left when she was 19 to become a domestic worker in Nueva Loja. She recalls everyday gestures of disdain from *mestizos*:

You don't have anyone to talk to, to get along with; you spend time stuck in the house. If you go outside, they might see that you are different ... that I'm not like them, I'm indigenous ... They look down on you; they don't express the same friendliness as they do among *mestizos* ... With the indigenous they have mistrust ... It's the treatment, the gazes ... Sometimes they don't even believe that you are worth the dust on their shoes.

Jessica's husband, a *mestizo* man from the southern Amazon, asks, "Why would the Indian go to the outside [of the jungle], if on the outside you don't have family? What are you going to do?" These questions echo many ethnographic accounts of indigenous discrimination in town and urban spaces in the Andes (Babb 2018; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1998; Radcliffe 2015; Seligmann 2004), and they serve as reminders that the material inequalities associated with neoliberal agrarian policies reproduce symbolic hierarchies of ethnic difference.

Today, Playas' residents find themselves in a double bind. Families depend on agriculture for subsistence and face diverse forms of exclusion in cities, but farm work is widely discussed in pejorative terms, as toil that is socially valueless. Some teens explain that they do not aspire to abandon their farms altogether, but rather to earn enough money to hire labourers to maintain their farms. "If you aren't capable of working a real job", remarks Sixto, a member of Playas' local government, "then the farm is there waiting for you". Olimpo, a recent High School graduate, describes the farm and the jungle that surrounds it as spaces for "adventure", not dignified work. He says, "you don't go to school to wield a machete forever". Today, Olimpo is working in mines on the coast and, when available, he grabs shifts as a kitchen hand in tourist lodges located a few hours upriver from Playas. Very few young men have access to housing and other resources necessary to pursue university degrees in urban centres, but those who are in universities in Nueva Loja, Cuenca and Quito study tourism or related disciplines, like gastronomy or accounting.

In turn, post-agrarian aspirations have reshaped Playas' relations with FONAKISE and the state. In 2008, Playas' residents seized oil equipment that the state oil company was moving into their parish and kidnapped an oil worker to force negotiations for compensation.³ Subsequently, state actors built an urban-like resettlement for Playas' residents in the parish centre (Lyll 2017). They also promised to prioritise tourism development in the medium-term, including the construction of a five-star hotel in Playas, from which tourists might make day-trips and overnight in community-built cabins. Representatives of the provincial Kichwa organisation FONAKISE criticised Playas' leadership for striking this deal. In 2014, in a series of interviews in FONAKISE offices in Nueva Loja, leaders blamed the state for dividing the community and Playas' leadership for currying favour with Correa to further personal political ambitions. FONAKISE's youth leader offered a different explanation, rooted in the everyday experiences of young residents: "The youth [in Playas] say that they don't want to be Kichwa ... They want to stop being what they are". He explained that the racism that young people experience in Nueva Loja conditions their aspirations – that is, it shapes what is socially acceptable to pursue. The state's compensation package for Playas and the promise of tourism was widely supported by residents and inspired urban migrants to return home, as the community's population more than doubled.

Subsequently, the state improved highways to the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve and intervened in the 20 tourism agencies and multiple community-based tourism initiatives in the reserve. New regulations generated some tensions, as the Ministry of Tourism required that local guides obtain High School degrees and the Ministry of the Environment required that boats use ecological motors. Nonetheless, tourism increased more than threefold in Cuyabeno, from 5,439 visitors in 2006 to 17,072 visitors in 2015, according to the Ministry of Tourism's website in 2017.

The voices of young men with experience in service industries gained force within Playas' town assembly, challenging older leadership and facilitating the formation of three new tourism associations. In his late 20s, Edgar Noteno cultivated connections with investors in Quito, enrolled in intensive English-language courses, developed a website and Facebook page and held a logo competition for the community assembly to choose its brand. Like other men in their late 20s and early 30s, Edgar offers a vision of a strengthened community, integrated through tourism activities. Playas is the largest community in its parish, but in the 2014 elections, a candidate from a smaller community won the contest in large part because he had lived abroad and articulated a clear vision of how to capture flows of international tourists. One man, explaining why he voted for the victor instead of his own family members, explains, "Being from here, one only knows what one sees", pointing to the other side of the river, "but he has another vision". Since the 2014 collapse in oil prices, hopes have withered in Playas that they will receive the hotel that was promised them, but Edgar and other young men have redoubled efforts to lobby the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment to secure permits to expand community-built lodges and bird-watching towers.

In Playas and Quilotoa, histories of agrarian hardship, coupled with urban exclusions, have shaped the pursuit of post-agrarian futures in rural landscapes. Interviewees emphasise that they aspire towards mutual social recognition and reintegrated communal spaces. These aspirations have proven resilient, despite unfulfilled promises from the state, as young leaders seek to strengthen tourism associations and build their own initiatives.

Rescaling rural politics

In this section, we highlight three ways in which dominant visions of the future have transformed politics in Playas and Quilotoa. We do not suggest that the trends outlined below are indicative of all agrarian places in Ecuador; however, our ethnographic analyses of the changing actors, scales and terms of rural politics in these particular sites reflect some of the wide-ranging effects that post-agrarian aspirations have and suggest the need to account for how imaginaries of the future influence politics in agrarian territories.

First, new forms of local authority have emerged. The ostensibly democratic spheres of town assemblies are subject to fluid, political struggles over authority (Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld 2015) that have long been shaped by gender, educational credentials and economic inequalities, among other forms of difference (Bebbington and Carroll 2002; Paulson 2003). In Playas and Quilotoa, we find that young, male former migrants have risen in influence through their ability to articulate visions for what a post-agrarian community could be. They tend to boast foreign language skills or at least professional experience in service industries. Some have taken college courses or hold college degrees in subjects related to tourism. Their skills may not have generated demonstrable results yet, but they exercise authority in public spheres based on their ability to inspire others to envision pathways towards reintegrated, post-agrarian communities.

It is important to note that new forms of authority engender new forms of social stratification. Tourism organisations or associations distribute economic opportunities and impose restrictions on members, depending on perceptions of economic need and of the capacities of individuals to respond to tourists' expectations. As individual members accumulate opportunities, inchoate inequalities can become amplified, for example,

when those individuals develop direct ties to travel agencies or an online presence on travel websites. In a 2014 survey of 61 members of the tourism organisation in Quilotoa (of approximately 100 members), only four members reported that they had employees, whereas two members, who enjoyed direct relationships with agencies, reported that they regularly employed non-family members. In the case of Playas, more meager flows of tourists have not generated such obvious forms of stratification; yet, the community has given permission to a few young men to offer independent tours to cabins built by associations by paying the associations a small fee. As these individuals develop direct relationships with agencies in Quito, learn to navigate Booking.com and TripAdvisor and create their own Facebook sites, there is potential for a few privileged actors to emerge, as they have in Quilotoa.

The second way in which rural politics are changing in these communities is that both research sites have witnessed disengagement from indigenous organisations that promote agrarian demands. Families in these sites continue to engage in agricultural production, to some degree; however, Quilotoans have withdrawn from MICC and Playas' leaders no longer participate in FONAKISE. While people in these communities have long maintained mixed, agrarian and non-agrarian livelihoods, a tendential shift from agrarian towards tourism organising suggests a partial rescaling of political relations. Communities withdraw from regional networks into more atomistic, communal businesses. Edgar Noteno's father, Bercelino, is a regionally recognised shaman who was an active participant in regional Kichwa organisations from the 1980s into the 2000s. By contrast, as an emerging community leader, Edgar dedicates much of his time and energy to cultivating networks with tourism agencies in Quito and maintaining contacts with North American and European friends via Facebook and Gmail. Community meetings in Quilotoa and Playas are increasingly dedicated to coordinating the rights and obligations of members participating in tourism initiatives and mediating internal conflicts over jobs and payments, while collective action and lobbying efforts are tailored to the needs of communal businesses.

Third, we highlight changing political relations between the state and rural communities. Governance literature has explored how modern states “govern the future” (Diprose et al. 2008) or, in other words, legitimate state institutions and practices in terms of imagined futures (Muller 2010; Smith and Vasudevan 2017). Our case studies reveal a particular relation between governance strategies and the sociopolitical life of aspirations in rural Ecuador. The post-neoliberal state did not produce altogether new desires and subjectivities. Rather, in sites like Quilotoa and Playas, the state harnessed existing aspirations, rooted in shared historical experiences of agrarian neglect and urban exclusion, to encourage rural subjects to shift their organisational locus from the agrarian *comuna* (community) towards the tourist *empresa* (business). Even as rural subjects continue to struggle with state institutions over tourism investments and regulations, state actors re-inscribe their roles in rural places within post-agrarian imaginaries, thus consolidating tourism as a key terrain of negotiation and contestation on which state actors make claims to legitimacy.

Conclusions

Agrarian reforms in Ecuador acted as temporary escape valves for tensions over land access in the Andes (Barsky 1980; Bretón 1997), but they failed to ensure support for

Andean peasant production, prevent the re-concentration of agrarian resources into the hands of elites, or anticipate the scale of territorial dispossession that Amazonian groups would suffer (Chiriboga 1988; Murmis 1986; Iriarte de Aspurz 1980). An exclusive reorganisation and modernisation of rural territories (Kay 1995), coupled with expanding oil extraction in the Amazon, spurred a multi-scalar articulation of local and regional indigenous organisations into a national movement that put forward demands for “land and dignity” in national politics into the twenty-first century (Becker 2010). Indigenous organisations continue to engage in contentious agrarian politics today (Clark 2016; Peña 2016). Yet, the same agrarian distress that fed into the growth of a national indigenous movement also led to heavy rural–urban outmigration in the Andes and the Amazon (Bilsborrow et al. 1987; Gray 2009) and a deepening stigmatisation of agrarian livelihoods.

We have traced the subsequent emergence of post-agrarian aspirations in two very different communities in the Ecuadorian Andes and Amazon, where community tourism is similarly perceived as an alternative to agrarian work that might help to reintegrate social networks within communal spaces. Other material factors that might be expected to drive post-agrarian planning, such as crop price volatility (Patel 2013) or climate change-induced seasonal variability (Gray and Bilsborrow 2013), were conspicuously absent from the narratives we documented. Instead, aspirations were largely oriented towards greater social embeddedness, a finding that resonates with studies of rural experiences in other national contexts that have endured neoliberal reforms and social dissolution (Dorondel and Şerban 2019; Hirsch 2018; Nielsen and Majumder 2016). In turn, as young people in Quilotoa and Playas imagine and project local economies towards new alternatives, community tourism consolidates as an important sphere of local leadership and of political negotiation in direct relations between communities (or tourism associations) and the state, in effect disrupting relations between communities and regional indigenous organisations.

The stories of economic reorganisation that we tell in this article have no resolution. Tourism has neither failed nor flourished in these sites – at least, it has not flourished in the terms to which people aspire. Residents of Quilotoa and Playas divide their time and energies between the farm and tourism. Yet, as the story of the Quilotoan who left his well-paying supervisor position to help with his family’s hotel illustrates, any holistic appraisal of these investments of time and energy must account for both economic and social outcomes. That is, the aspirations we document do not reflect idealised notions of “revived local competitiveness” (Swyngedouw 2000, 68), prominent in neoliberal accounts of the promises of tourism (see Brenner and Wachsmuth 2012), but rather they reflect more clear-headed visions of risk and sacrifice oriented towards reviving affective, social networks. The energy invested into collectively producing handicrafts in Quilotoa or to building cabins in Playas have, in fact, served to reinvigorate family and communal spheres.

We conclude by positing the need for studies on agrarian change that examine the nexus of governance and aspiration. While influential voices in agrarian studies have posited that development institutions produce new desires among rural subjects (Li 2007, 196), we have shown how state actors negotiate their legitimacy in rural spaces in terms of socially and historically conditioned aspirations. Researchers of agrarian change should not overlook the broad social-historical processes, including mobility and education, that structure rural aspirations in social experience and everyday lives

beyond the farm. As new processes of territorial dispossession and state capture of political energies unfold across agrarian landscapes, state actors are likely to continue to legitimate state action (or inaction) not by producing new subjectivities, but rather by negotiating in relation to rural landscapes and peoples that are already impressed by their historical conditions.

Notes

1. See Rasmussen (2019) in this special issue for an ethnographic study of the communal organisation of non-agrarian enterprises in Andean Peru as well as Jakobsen and Nielsen (2019) for their discussion of compounding aspirations, also in this issue.
2. In Playas del Cuyabeno, one author engaged in semi-structured interviews and participant observation while farming, contributing to community work projects and teaching in the high school for extended periods. In Quilotoa, the other two authors engaged in less participation and, instead, dedicated time and resources to surveys, semi-structured interviews and observation in community assemblies.
3. In such frontier spaces as the northern Ecuadorian Amazon, state actors have frequently tried to take natural resources prior to seeking consent or legitimacy, despite national and international legislation regarding indigenous rights to free, prior and informed consent (Rasmussen and Lund 2018).

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Notes on contributors

Angus Lyall is a PhD candidate in geography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research centres on the politics of development and natural resources in Ecuador. Recent publications have appeared in the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*; *Culture, Theory, and Critique*; and *Development and Change*. He is a member of the Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador.

Since 1991, **Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld** has written and taught about community economies and cultural change in the context of globalisation. His most recent book is *Fast, Easy and in Cash: Artisan Hardship and Hope in the Global Economy* (with Jason Antrosio, Chicago 2015). He is currently the Senior Associate Dean for Social Sciences and Global Programs in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Joe Quick is a lecturer of anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee at Waukesha. His research explores the grounded actions and global contexts of indigenous development in highland Ecuador, particularly the ways that institutions grow and change in response to larger histories of social-political-economic exclusion and conditional inclusion. His work may be found in the *Latin American Research Review* and the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*.

ORCID

Angus C. Lyall  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9199-5415>

Joe Quick  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0452-9505>

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