

PRECARIOUS ALTERNATIVE: SUSTAINING THE POPULAR SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN ECUADOR

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I declare that this submission is my own work and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text. Nor does this thesis contain any material that has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma at the Australian National University or other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex D'Aloia', written in a cursive style.

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Whether it's the Popular Solidarity Economy, the Social Solidarity Economy, Communitarian Economy, or any other form of heterodox economic alternative, proponents emphasise that no productive undertaking is truly a solo endeavour. It is built through a network of relationships, and this thesis is no exception. Though, of course, any errors or shortcomings are entirely my own.

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ABSTRACT

Written into the Ecuadorian Constitution in 2008, the Popular Solidarity Economy (PSE) was intended to be an alternative economy that “put people before the market” and was a centrepiece of left-wing President Correa’s “21st Century Socialism”. Ten years later, staff at the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS) were uncertain about the future of the PSE and the institute itself. As politics shifted to the right, the place of the PSE and the IEPS appeared to be precarious to everyone involved—government functionaries, academics, NGO staff, and actors in the alternative economy itself.

Conducting research with the IEPS, I sought to understand how staff attempted to keep the PSE alive as an economic alternative during a period of waning political interest. While there, I came to see how the many different actors surrounding the PSE experienced precarity in mutually reinforcing ways, whether it was government staff constantly being replaced, NGOs seeking program funding, or PSE actors who were mostly trying to string together livelihoods from multiple unstable income sources.

Beyond the precarity experienced by individuals, I use the term ‘precarious alternative’ to highlight the position of the PSE as a whole. Firstly, with waning interest from both the public and the rest of government, the PSE was in danger of collapsing as a policy framework. Secondly, as the lack of political and economic support pushed the IEPS into encouraging more entrepreneurial strategies among program beneficiaries, the PSE itself risked becoming little different from the rest of

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the economy—its status as an alternative was also under threat. At the same time, I argue that the very alterity of the PSE created resonances with entrepreneurial logics of disruption.

In my analysis, I focus on the labour of IEPS staff. In doing so, I am able to show how experiences of precarity in both their work and careers pushed them to follow economic logics that reinforced the precarity of others. In a context in which having a ‘side hustle’ appeared sensible, the PSE became a vehicle for promoting micro-entrepreneurialism. What was originally a response to the neoliberalism of the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s in Ecuador became another precarious thread in a patchwork of livelihood strategies.

In this thesis, I am making an intervention into the anthropological literature on precarity and bureaucracy. I do this by examining how precarity is ported into and then reinforced by the state, not just through high-level policy decisions, but by the lived experiences of bureaucrats. Economic uncertainty encouraged many staff to have their own ‘side hustles’. Entrepreneurial endeavours, however, were not only economic strategies but projects of self-making, with IEPS staff and other PSE proponents using entrepreneurial strategies to remake themselves as affectively engaged bureaucrats. As IEPS staff attempted to sustain both their careers and the PSE under precarious circumstances, they also made the PSE’s status as an alternative itself precarious.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CONAIE—Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador

IEPS—National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy

IFAD—International Fund for Agricultural Development

FENOCIN—National Federation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Black Organisations

FUNORSAL—Foundation of Campesino Organisations of Salinas

PSE—Popular Solidarity Economy

SERCOP—National Public Procurement Service

INTRODUCTION

Working Through Precarity

To formally begin my research, I needed a letter of approval from the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS in Spanish). Getting this letter was a microcosm of the issues I speak to in this thesis. In September of 2017, I spent a month in Ecuador, primarily in Quito, conducting pre-fieldwork. My research was on the Popular Solidarity Economy (PSE)—a heterodox approach to economics that considers the economy as more than self-interested rational actors in the marketplace. The IEPS was the government department tasked with enacting policy to promote and strengthen this alternative economy. I had conducted a small amount of research with the institute in 2015 for a minor thesis as part of my Master of Development Studies and had maintained a loose connection to the IEPS in the interim. In late 2017, I had returned to Quito to renew my contacts as well as get a formal letter of approval for my research, both for my university's ethics committee and for the researcher visa I would need for next year's fieldwork. My contacts and everyone else I spoke to at the Institute were more than happy for me to conduct research with them and were interested in my proposal. Getting a formal letter of approval from the Director General of the IEPS, however, proved more of a challenge. Everyone thought she would approve of my research, but she was a recent appointment and incredibly busy settling in. Getting a meeting to see her was difficult.

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With only two days remaining before I had to leave, I still did not have the letter. Then, late in the working day, I received a message from one of my contacts, Monse.¹ She told me that a change in the directorship had just been announced. The previous director I had been trying to see was no longer in the role, but if I popped by the next day, she could get me in to see the acting Director General. I jumped on the opportunity.

Monse was trying to take advantage of a break between appointments to squeeze me in, so I had to wait over an hour to be seen. Suddenly, I was rushed into an office. The acting Director General asked me a few questions about my research, conferred with a lawyer about the specific wording, and then signed the letter. The meeting took a few minutes at most. Just as a change in management had proved an initial hurdle for my research, another change presented a window of opportunity—one which Monse was quick to capitalise on.

I returned to Ecuador in January to find the directorship had changed again. This time one of my contacts who was already working in the IEPS, Nelly, had been made acting Director General. Within a couple of months, a new director was formally appointed, and Nelly returned to her regular position. The new director only lasted a couple of months, however, and was soon replaced again. During my time in Ecuador, from November 2017 to December 2018, there were three directors general, not including those temporarily acting in the position, and at least one more has been instated since I left. Each time, a change in directorship triggered a cascade. The new Director General replaced many of the directors below them, who then replaced managers below them, who replaced other staff

¹ The names of all my interlocutors have been changed throughout the entire thesis. Only the names of those giving public addresses have been retained. Similarly, the names of all small enterprises and NGOs have either been changed or removed, with only large, well-known organisations being identified by their actual names.

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below them, and so on and so forth down the line. Some staff stayed on, especially those with *nombramiento*—a permanent position in the Ecuadorian public service. Overall, however, the turnover in personnel created problems throughout the institute.

And yet work continued to be done. In my case, the letter was signed in a brief window of opportunity, and I was able to return to Ecuador to conduct my research. The vast majority of proposed projects and programs I followed during my fieldwork floundered, stalled, or outright failed, but a few managed to generate action beyond bureaucratic administration. The turnover in personnel was a constant throughout my fieldwork, largely setting the tenor and tempo of my research. Everyone, including myself, was aware that people and policy could change at incredibly short notice. Any lasting program or position always felt precarious, as if they could, in a moment, collapse under their own weight.

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In this thesis, I am making an intervention into the anthropological literature on precarity by examining both its effects and origins within bureaucracy. In particular, I highlight how, as precarity was experienced by government functionaries, it came to be replicated in their work, resulting in a reinforcement of precarity for others. Precarity as a condition of labour has largely been examined by anthropologists studying post-Fordist work² and high finance (Ho 2009). An oft-unspoken foil to these conditions is secure wage labour, with employment in the public service often considered the most secure (e.g., Allison 2012; Kalleberg 2011; Standing 2011 esp. 8–9). Not only that, but as the ultimate regulator of the market, the state itself is often portrayed as the only actor capable of ameliorating

² See, for example: Guyer (2004, 2007), Millar (2018), and Sopranzetti (2017).

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precarity (e.g., Kalleberg 2011; Quinlan 2012; Standing 2011). The question I seek to answer in this thesis is how bureaucracy operates when it, too, is put under conditions of precarity, and what its effects are for those who interact with it. Focusing on the labour and experiences of bureaucrats highlights how economic precarity is not just caused by the surrounding political-economic context but feeds into it via the realisation of policy by real people—government functionaries.

In my analysis, I examine the enactment of the PSE as what I call a ‘precarious alternative’. With this formulation, I highlight the importance proponents placed on the PSE’s status as an alternative economy. It is an economy that is supposed to value “people over the market” and put “labour ahead of capital”, all while building toward *sumak kawsay*, also known as Buen Vivir—a holistic conception of development that has its origins in Indigenous cosmologies (Asamblea Nacional 2018, Art. 1). Perhaps most importantly, for proponents the PSE was a perpetual outsider. It was always defined by what it was against—neoliberal capitalism—rather than what it was for.

At the same time, I want to highlight the precarious status of the PSE itself and how this was experienced in multiple, reinforcing ways. By developing an ethnographic account of precarity in a bureaucracy, I show how insecure work within a government context meant that bureaucrats took actions that then bolstered the precarity of others, primarily through running short-term programs and strongly encouraging PSE enterprises to move into the private market. Precarious bureaucrats made for a state of precarity just as much as a precarious state made for precarious bureaucrats.

Following Millar (2017, 2018), I argue that these differing experiences of precarity are not distinct, but interrelated. The forms of precarity encountered by IEPS staff, both in their lives and those of program beneficiaries, shaped their realisation of PSE policy. This is significant because, as highlighted by recent work on both financialisation and brokerage, in-between spaces matter (Chong 2018; Ellison 2018; Han 2012; Le Meur 2006; Lindquist 2015a, 2015b; Schuster and Kar 2021; van

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Ufford 1993; Ho 2009). Between theory, legislation, and overarching policy documents on the one hand, and the lived realities of the wider public on the other, actors such as IEPS bureaucrats come to make abstract concepts (such as the PSE) material in people's lives. The in-between was a prime avenue for the expansion of precarious economic forms as well as articulating an alternative to neoliberal austerity economics.

The importance of in-between spaces and actors complicates analyses that see relatively linear processes between the interests of capital and the state (often as embodied by economic elites) on the one hand and government policy and regulation on the other (e.g., Amsler and Shore 2017; Falconer 2018; Ferguson 2009, 1994; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Lana Medina 2017; Sassen 2014; Schild 2000; Scott 2005; Shore 2008; Shore and Wright 2011, 2015; Soederberg 2016; Wedel 2011). In emphasising the in-between, I do not deny the imposition of economic logics by the powerful. Instead, I seek to emphasise how such logics change as they are necessarily enacted by a myriad of intermediaries, such as IEPS staff.

At the same time, just as economic logics were changed as they were mediated between policy elites and program beneficiaries, so, too, were the anti-capitalist ideals of many IEPS staff. Proponents took practical steps to try and keep the PSE alive as an alternative economy under uncertain circumstances—almost everyone I spoke to was emphatic in their repudiation of neoliberal capitalism and wanted to ensure the PSE remained an alternative, even if they felt there was limited support from the rest of government. As they attempted to keep the PSE alive as a policy framework, however, resonances developed between alternative economies and neoliberal entrepreneurialism—both were built around an assumption of an unreliable state, both were structured around short-term time horizons, and both were focused on economic logics of seizing opportunities in the disruption of established markets. Focusing on the PSE as a 'precarious alternative' both highlights these similarities

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between neoliberal entrepreneurialism and the PSE, while also drawing attention to how attempts to secure its status as an economic alternative threatened its continuation as a policy framework.

In this introduction, I first present a brief history of the PSE before exploring the importance of its alternative status. I then discuss the concept of precarity in more depth, highlighting how it can be both a subjective experience and structural condition of labour that are mutually reinforcing. After this, I offer a description of both my fieldsite and methodology—in particular, how the ubiquitous precarity led me to treat the PSE itself as an ethnographic site. Finally, I present a summary of my chapters before concluding with a discussion of how my thesis contributes to the anthropological literature, not only on precarity, but also bureaucracy, entrepreneurialism, and neoliberalism more broadly.

History of an Alternative Economy

In 2008, Ecuador adopted a new constitution. Off the back of decades of mobilisation against neoliberal government policies by Indigenous and Leftist groups, the ratification of the new constitution was the high-water mark of the movement known as the Citizens' Revolution in Ecuador. A broad coalition brought together by the charismatic president Rafael Correa, many participants in the movement hoped that the 2008 constitution would mark a break with the previous decades of neoliberal reform instituted at the behest of local elites and international economic groups, especially the IMF and World Bank. It was also part of a regional political shift often referred to as Latin America's Pink Tide, in which, over the course of the first decade of the new millennium, many Latin American governments shifted to the left, including but not limited to Venezuela (who shifted earlier

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in the 1990s), Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil. For a time, there was a sense that what Correa called “the long, dark neoliberal night”³ was over.

While never generating the same level of international renown as other constitutional innovations, such as the rights of nature,⁴ the constitution declared Ecuador’s economy to be “social and solidary” and recognised the PSE as one of four sectors, alongside the public, private, and mixed economies. The PSE was one of the central planks of Correa’s attempt to restructure the national economy. Where the constitution itself provided few details on the alternative economy, the later Organic Law of the PSE defined it as

“...the form of economic organisation wherein its members, individually or collectively, organise and develop processes of production, exchange, commercialisation, financing and consumption of goods and services to satisfy needs and generate incomes, based in relations of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity, privileging labour and the human being as subject and end of its activity, oriented toward Buen Vivir, in harmony with nature, over appropriation, profit and the accumulation of capital” (Asamblea Nacional 2018).⁵

Notable in this definition is how the first half sits comfortably within classical economics, while the second half includes alternative elements. The first part of the definition, up until satisfying needs

³ This was a common refrain of Correa, used both in his 2009 book and many political speeches. See, for example: UNCTAD (2014) and Presidencia de la República del Ecuador (n.d.).

⁴ See, for example: Berros (2021), Espinosa (2019), Fitz-Henry (2021), Kauß (2018), and Valladares and Boelens (2017).

⁵ Author’s own translation.

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and generating incomes, sounds like a traditional economic understanding of an economy—people organising through markets to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services to satisfy their needs and wants. The second half of the definition, from being based in relations of solidarity onwards, describes a set of social values that mark the PSE as distinct from the rest of the economy. Nelms (2015b, 108) borrows from one of his interlocutors when he describes the challenge these values represent to government functionaries as “the problem of delimitation”—that is, “how to demarcate the [PSE] as a ‘social’ alternative”. This problem was a subtle yet constant influence on almost all PSE proponents I met—how to encourage or undertake economic action that integrated with the rest of the economy but was still distinct from it. A complex history of integration and difference is what I explore throughout this section.

Alternative economies are not always positioned as separate from the mainstream. In his studies of alternative currencies and Islamic finance, Maurer (2005, 2013) highlights how proponents oscillate between emphasising the alternative nature of their economic projects and simply living in the world as it already is. In doing so, Maurer is not simply arguing for greater attention to be paid to *what* marks alternative economic projects as different but to the social conditions of *when* proponents treat their project as different and *when* they treat them as hardly distinct from the rest of the economy. In the case of the IEPS at the time of my fieldwork, given the precarious political and economic context for the institute, there were strong pressures pushing them toward emphasising the integrating aspects of the PSE. As argued throughout this thesis, it was particularly those aspects of the PSE that resonated with international discourses on entrepreneurialism that made for a closer alignment with the economic mainstream. At the same time, again as highlighted by Maurer (2013, 3–4), even when alternative economic projects are being treated as resonant with mainstream economic discourses, they “continue to produce dissonant vibrations”. Proponents do not simply engage in the alternative or the

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mainstream economy, but “productively engage in and perform a plurality”. Despite being influenced by its logics, the PSE was never simply a synonym for entrepreneurialism.

This oscillation between the PSE as an alternative and a mainstream economy was assisted by the way in which it was constructed. The second part of the definition lists a series of social values without any identifiers of relative importance or hierarchy. For example, it is not clear from the definition whether “relations of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity” are in any way related to or more important than being “in harmony with nature”. Such non-hierarchical listing was common throughout my fieldwork in relation to the PSE—both in formal written documents and in more casual discussion of the alternative economy. Nelms (2015b), in the same piece, notes how non-hierarchical listing assisted government functionaries and other PSE practitioners with the everyday demands of their work in promoting an alternative economy. Such an open-ended aesthetic allowed them to provisionally mark the borders of the PSE for bureaucratic purposes, while allowing the possibility of change as the situation demanded. At the same time, I argue that this same malleability played a large role in how easily entrepreneurial logics were incorporated into the PSE.

My interlocutors were aware of the tensions around the need to demarcate the PSE as separate to the wider economy. Several IEPS staff expressed this as a fear that, rather than creating an economic alternative, they were just creating “more little capitalists”. The PSE’s alternative status was of fundamental importance to its proponents and, by extension, to its existence as a political project. Across very divergent groups (such as small-scale farmers, representatives from Indigenous and campesino unions, academics, NGO staff, etc.), it was often the sense of being broadly against capitalism that held the whole edifice together. It was the main reason they were all in the same room. At the same time, because of waning political interest, almost everyone I spoke to also believed PSE

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enterprises needed to be successful in that self-same capitalist economy. IEPS staff and others working to promote the PSE found themselves adopting economic logics of the system they opposed.

In my analysis, I follow the lead of Sopranzetti (2017, 79), who intentionally avoids a false-consciousness approach to the affective appeal of neoliberalism. Rather than assuming people are “duped” or “brainwashed” into following neoliberal economic strategies and logics, he takes the appeal of neoliberalism’s flexibility seriously. When talking about the appeal of “freedom” to motorcycle taxi drivers in Thailand, he notes that “it became dominant not because it duped these workers or obliged them to conform to it, but because it connected the requirements of post-Fordist restructuring with the everyday desires and aspirations of its increasingly precarious workers”. I argue that many entrepreneurial logics—such as the need to identify a value-added proposition,⁶ the importance of finding a niche in the market, and the constant call to seize opportunities—came to prominence for similar reasons. They connected the requirements of a precarious government institution with the desires and aspirations of a network of precarious actors—government functionaries with little job security, NGO staff always seeking a funding source, and PSE producers⁷ themselves, who were almost

⁶ The term my interlocutors most commonly used was “valor agregado”. As I discuss in more depth in Chapter Four, *valor agregado* was used to refer to a wide range of phenomena. Some uses aligned closely to the English ‘value added proposition’, as used in marketing, while others were much more ephemeral, possibly referring to social values or personal qualities.

⁷ The most common term used by my interlocutors for someone engaged in economic activity within the PSE was “PSE actor”. It was, however, ambiguous. Formally, it referred to the legal identity of a PSE organisation; however, in practice, people tended to use it to refer to individuals participating in any productive PSE enterprise, whether an association, cooperative, or even as an individual. For clarity, I generally eschew ‘PSE actor’, except for when quoting legislation or my interlocutors. Instead, I use ‘PSE producer’ to refer to individuals engaging in economic activity relating

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always juggling several income streams to piece together livelihoods. Importantly, for government functionaries, NGO staff, and many project beneficiaries, this broad coalition was held together by a shared opposition to capitalism.

This complicated relationship between the desires to be against the mainstream and yet a need to conform to it is not only a result of present political and economic circumstances. It was baked into the PSE from the very beginning due to its complicated history. The PSE was the result of at least two political trends. On the one hand, it was the result of various intellectual and political movements opposed to neoliberal capitalism and the state formations that had promoted it. On the other hand, the PSE was an outcome of state action to try and create an alternative economy. The PSE was an attempt to create an alternative by the mainstream.

To summarise the intellectual labour that went into creating this mainstream alternative, the PSE can be loosely thought of as the convergence of an academic legacy with the intellectual work done by activists, especially Indigenous movements. Although, as I discuss in Chapter One, this latter history is largely erased in the policy discourse. On the academic side, the most prominent PSE theorists for those I spoke to in Ecuador were a number of left-wing economists, particularly those from the Southern Cone,⁸ who de-emphasise rational, self-interested decision-making in a market of presumed scarcity and instead examine economics as “relations between human beings and the natural

to the PSE and ‘PSE enterprise’ to refer to the legal entity.

⁸ The principal source I cite for Corragio is his book *Economía Social y Solidaria*. Published in Quito with a foreword by Acosta, it is a compilation of his essays relating to the Social Solidarity Economy. Aside from collating many of his most influential works, the book itself was a common reference point for many PSE proponents, making it an object of inquiry in and of itself.

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environment from which they derive their sustenance” (Laville 2010, 77).⁹ This emphasis on the social and cultural embeddedness of economies rapidly lent itself to a focus by the IEPS on the mentalities of PSE actors—how they understood and embodied PSE values.

The other key intellectual lineage for the PSE was a long series of social movements resisting the economic liberalisation of Ecuador from the 1980s onwards. The place of this history of protest in the construction of the PSE is complicated. The powerful protests of Indigenous and other leftist groups throughout the 1990s and early 2000s led to the election of Rafael Correa in 2006 and the new constitution of 2008. The constitution, despite hardly mentioning the PSE, was a touchstone for many vocal PSE proponents. The vice-president, who for a brief period was officially the highest authority regarding the PSE, regularly invoked the 2008 constitution and the months-long assembly that drafted the text, referring to it as “the most democratic process in the nation’s history.” At the same time, the political struggles leading up to it were never referred to by anyone I spoke to in Ecuador. The history of anti-neoliberal protest was effectively erased.

This erasure ties into the overall argument of the thesis. I argue that part of the importance of the problem of delimitation—why it was so important to set the PSE apart from the rest of the economy—was that the intellectual history of anti-capitalist resistance and the entrepreneurial logics that came to be dominant in IEPS practices were not as disparate as they might have seemed at first. While intellectuals and activists on the left decried the withdrawal of the state, their discourse (like that of modern entrepreneurialism) was founded on a distrust of government and based on themes of disruption to the status quo and being against Big Business. In the case of many academics, such as

⁹ See also: Acosta (2011), Razeto M (2015), and Coraggio (2011).

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Coraggio and Razeto, they were left-wing intellectuals who emigrated from their respective countries as right-wing coups took place—they had reasons to distrust the state. In the case of social movements, they were founded on opposition to government policy. They enjoyed a brief *détente* with the government, but it was followed by further conflict. Across all cases, the goal has been the disruption of the status quo, often embodied by the state and Big Business. In a sense, the PSE was a form of entrepreneurialism for socialists—it took the themes of risk-taking, innovation, and added value common to entrepreneurialism and filtered them through a set of values embodied and enacted by those who self-identify on the political left.

The PSE as an Alternative

Despite the tension commonly felt by those involved in and around the PSE as to its status as an alternative, many people I spoke to also asserted that the PSE had always existed. Rather than an alternative economy to be created, for them it was a way to make visible the myriad of economic actions and relationships that escape neoclassical ideas of the rational, profit-seeking individual. As discussed in this section, this sense of making existing practices visible had a strong influence on how the PSE was realised as a set of policies.

Like many alternative economy projects, proponents often constructed the PSE in relation to an idealised past of enduring social relations (Maurer 2005; B. Weiss 2016). Although, as highlighted by Ansell (2014) in regard to various left-wing development projects in Brazil, while nostalgia often appears to be shared across groups, closer inquiry often reveals how the specific past people long for often varies substantially along axes of social difference. A group might all long for a lost past of community solidarity, but what each person means by ‘community’ or ‘solidarity’ can vary substantially.

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Nevertheless, proponents still emphasised the PSE as a project of *visibilización* ('visibilisation'—the act of making something visible).

Consequently, as a policy framework, the PSE came to emphasise existing economic practices among different communities, especially those of credit associations, microenterprises, and traditional practices such as *minga*—an Andean form of collective work. It did this primarily through two avenues—various forms of public information session (lecture, workshop, conference, etc.) and the formal registration of PSE enterprises. Three types of enterprise made up the vast bulk of recognised PSE organisations: popular economic units, cooperatives, and associations. The first were essentially sole traders, though they could have up to six members. Cooperatives, for the most part, pre-dated PSE legislation. In fact, there was already so much pre-existing regulation regarding cooperatives that IEPS staff generally discouraged potential PSE actors from forming them. Instead, they pushed people to form associations.

Associations were essentially cooperatives for small groups (minimum of ten people). Although, in practice, they often behaved like other small businesses, there were at least three key differences. Firstly, all profits had to be distributed evenly between members. Secondly, all members were entitled to an equal vote in the decisions of the association (in comparison to voting rights equivalent to shares held). Thirdly, positions on the board (president, treasurer, etc.) had to be voted on and rotated. IEPS staff pushed PSE actors to form associations because they were seen to encourage the social values of the PSE. During times of deep discussion or reflection, IEPS staff often acknowledged that there were associations that behaved more like regular microenterprises; however, formally registering as an association often operated as a heuristic for staff when considering whether an enterprise was conceptually part of the mainstream economy or embodying a more heterodox approach to economic activity.

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Finally, it is important to note that there were many organisations that were not formally a part of the PSE but were discursively used by PSE proponents as examples of the alternative economy. Yunguilla was a key example of this. Technically a corporation formed by an Indigenous community, Yunguilla pre-dated PSE legislation. Nevertheless, it had been formed such that every member of the community had an equal number of shares and therefore an equal vote. Similarly, the constitution of the corporation stated that profits could not be distributed. Instead, they had to be reinvested or spent on community improvements. Despite formally being a corporation, and therefore not within the remit of the IEPS, many PSE proponents referred to Yunguilla as a quintessential example of the PSE. That the term 'PSE' could be used to refer to both formally registered associations and entities like Yunguilla that were legally considered corporations highlights how the PSE was at the same time a set of formal policies and a discursive construct used to unite different understandings of solidarity economics.

Being formed from different understandings of diverse economic practices, the PSE itself was constructed in a precarious position from the outset, both as a policy framework and as a section of the economy delimited from the mainstream. As detailed above, one response was to give the PSE expression through existing practices, though proponents always ran the risk that the PSE might be subsumed by the wider economy. Another response was to cohere around a core of theorists. In particular, my interlocutors often referred to Acosta, Razeto, and Coraggio, as well as occasionally Karl Polanyi and Jean-Louis Laville. Even those who did not talk about theorists often spoke from a substantivist perspective.

Economic substantivism is an approach that considers economics not as a formal set of logics relating to relative scarcity, the maximisation of benefits, etc., but rather takes a holistic view of how

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individuals and societies provision their material needs.¹⁰ For many of my interlocutors, even those who did not explicitly talk about Polanyist theory, these ideas were simply given. For them, the PSE was not about the maximisation of benefits or based on relative scarcity, but was about provisioning the material needs of society, holistically conceived. They argued that there had always been economic activity that did not follow simple logics of profit and loss, that was not driven directly by profit motives, and that prioritised social values. The PSE was about helping people realise that there were already other ways of thinking about the economy.

Much of the political and economic anthropological literature on Ecuador and the Andes more broadly speaks to the heterogeneous economic practices in the region and how governments and NGOs have attempted to leverage them in projects of economic development. In particular, anthropologists have documented the interplay between small-scale economic enterprises, Indigenous practices, and state and NGO sponsored forms of economic development (e.g., Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld 2015; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Faas 2017, 2018). They have recorded how, largely since the 1990s and as part of a global trend, economic practices associated with Indigenous and working-class reproduction of family and community have been increasingly valorised by government and non-government organisations as strategies for economic development and poverty reduction.

Many of the practices that came to define the PSE were both a response to the neoliberal economic crises of the turn of the millennium and an extension of many of the neoliberal logics that drove those crises. This is a pattern Gago (2017), in Argentina, describes as “neoliberalism from

¹⁰ For an excellent description and discussion of economic substantivism, see: Laville (2010) and Polanyi (2001 [1944]).

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below”—when those groups most disadvantaged by neoliberalism incorporate some of its logics in creative ways in order to carve out livelihoods and occasionally even thrive. Anthropologists working in Ecuador have shown how neoliberal logics came to inflect those practices at the same time as communities and families leveraged entrepreneurial strategies to generate incomes (Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld 2015; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Faas 2017, 2018). The PSE is in many ways a natural extension of this pattern. Where Gago concentrates on the propagation of neoliberal logics by microentrepreneurs, however, I turn my focus to the bureaucrats tasked with realising public policy.

Possibly the most important indication of the anti-neoliberal status of their work for IEPS staff themselves was the financial support offered by the government for the PSE. This came through two primary programs—*ferias inclusivas* (inclusive fairs) and *catálogos dinámicos inclusivos* (dynamic inclusive catalogues). As discussed in Chapter Four, there were tensions between the underlying logics of these two programs. Nevertheless, both were forms of government procurement that purchased directly from registered PSE enterprises. According to government statistics, these programs made up the overwhelming majority of purchasing from the PSE, with different levels of government effectively keeping most PSE enterprises in business.

In contrast to neoliberal logics in which the market is seen as the ultimate arbiter of value and efficiency, both *ferias* and *catálogos* were based on non-competitive processes that distributed the economic benefits of being a government supplier equally among all successful applicants. Not only that, but both programs required highly detailed specifications of products supplied, down to the egg required each day for pre-school lunches. Prices were also inflexible with, in some cases, even the price of primary inputs being negotiated between the IEPS and primary material suppliers beforehand. Without the ability to compete on price and with the products supplied being highly specified, *ferias* and *catálogos* effectively removed the ability of PSE enterprises to follow the entrepreneurial ideals of

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innovation and flexibility. While IEPS trainers were lauding entrepreneurial values and encouraging PSE actors to be more *emprendedor* (enterprising/entrepreneurial), the format of the two biggest procurement programs from the PSE negated these values. This apparent contradiction was one of the key sites of dissonance between the PSE and entrepreneurialism.

Ecuador provides an excellent site for the examination of the diffusion of neoliberal logics due to the contingent alignment of factors that lead to both the creation of the PSE and the entrepreneurial form it took—a burgeoning anti-neoliberal Indigenous political movement, a global political context in which entrepreneurialism is highly valorised, a resurgent leftist political movement, and others addressed throughout this thesis. Several anthropologists studying entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism more broadly have examined the appeal of neoliberal logics to those traditionally considered by academics and activists as being the most in danger from precarity (e.g., Millar 2018; Muehlebach 2012; Sopranzetti 2017). Such analyses have largely, though not exclusively, been situated in contexts in which the political right has been considered ascendant. The PSE, however, was legislated under a strong, leftist government. Furthermore, despite being primarily focused on existing economic practices, the PSE has been largely promoted by the state, rather than organically developed from popular economic actions.¹¹ Ecuador, therefore, is an excellent site to compare and contrast understandings of how neoliberal and anti-neoliberal logics are leveraged, merged, and rejected by government functionaries.

¹¹ ‘Popular’ here refers to the ‘popular economy’, a concept commonly used by Latin American sociologists and economists as a way to look past classical macro approaches and study “the inner socio-economic logics of the informal economy” (Hillenkamp, 2013, 53). See, for example: Razeto (1999)

Precarious Alternative

Given the immense turnover in personnel during my fieldwork, not to mention the constant stream of projects that foundered due to lack of funding or broken connections as staff changed positions, precarity is the central analytic of my thesis. Many anthropologists have shown that the stability of the 20th Century welfare state was largely restricted to a subset of the white male population of developed Western countries (Betti 2016; Millar 2017, 2018; Munck 2013; Thorkelson 2016). While the rise of the gig economy and the end of Fordism might be a central concern of middle classes in the Global North, in countries like Ecuador, the vast majority of people have lived without labour security since colonial times. Not only that, but while there has been a growth in the size of Latin America's middle classes, anthropological and sociological works have highlighted how they are both poorer and their wealth less secure than previous understandings of middle class (Castellani and Parent 2011; Ferreira et al. 2013; Franco, Hopenhayn, and León 2011). With more markers of class status coming from consumption (often on credit) rather than ownership of enduring assets, middle-class status is easy to lose. Additionally, as highlighted by Harvey (2018) and Millar (2018), when it comes to the experience of precarity, it is not always insecure work that is felt to be the singular origin of instability. In their respective Latin American fieldsites, it was the unpredictable and yet almost omnipresent demand of kinship ties that was experienced as the origins of precarity and the need for highly flexible income strategies.

Even so, Muehlebach and Shoshan (2012) and Weston (2017) have highlighted that even in places where the Fordist promise of secure full employment and a welfare state were only partially realised at best, it still has an affective pull. Although Ecuador never became a wealthy country with a thorough welfare system, the twentieth-century welfare state still has a strong appeal, especially among the middle-class urban populations that made up the bulk of my interlocutors. Not only that, but where

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jobs in the civil services had once been considered stable in most Latin American countries, relative to many other careers, now they, too, are becoming less secure with more short or fixed-term contracts becoming the norm. In the case of Ecuador, the use of *contratos ocasionales* (loosely equivalent to fixed-term contracts) have been the particular focus of critics. This was true in the IEPS and especially Zone 9—the local team with whom I spent most of my time. Of a team of ten, half of Zone 9 were new faces by the time I left, and three of those five positions had turned over twice. There was a small core who had *nombramiento*—an ongoing position—but speaking to the others, most had been bouncing around roles in and out of government, generally being moved on every year or two, or sometimes even more often. For them, precarity was the norm and it deeply influenced the way they realised their work. Here I offer a brief summary of the use of precarity in the anthropological literature, with emphasis on how it is both an experience and a condition of labour.

Beyond ‘instability’, it is important to consider what we mean by ‘precarity’. Millar’s (2017) tripartite typology of anthropological approaches to precarity is helpful here. The first branch is precarity as a class, as embodied by the work of Guy Standing (2011). However, Standing’s image of a cohesive, or at least cohering, class is very much focused on the Global North and misses how disparate groups experience precarity in very different ways. In particular, Standing does not sufficiently reckon with how different experiences of precarity actually tie back into class difference, as I explore in Chapter Three.

Instead, it is the other two approaches highlighted by Millar that I follow. The first is a vein of literature following Bourdieu, in which precarity is primarily conceived as a labour condition made up of casual, short-term employment with a lack of social welfare (e.g., Castel 2003; Kalleberg 2011; Standing 2011; Vosko 2009). In some ways, this is an excellent description of the circumstances of both most IEPS staff and many PSE actors. As mentioned, many IEPS staff were constantly shifting

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position, and most PSE actors either had been, or were still, stitching together livelihoods from a variety of different income sources. At the same time, the PSE also somewhat represented an inversion of the traditional understanding of precarity, as proponents often framed the PSE as a way for people to escape the whims of corporations, employers, and even the constantly shifting political terrain. This emphasis on how precarity was experienced brings us to Millar's last category of precarity literature.

Following Butler (2004), Millar highlights a vein of literature primarily focusing on the ontological experience of precarity—how, at times, precarity can be felt throughout one's entire life and consequently can reshape a person's entire experience of the world they live in (e.g., Ettliger 2007; Hundle 2012; Tsing 2015). With regard to my fieldsite, a constant background tension for almost everyone I spoke to—bureaucrats, NGO staff, and PSE actors—was the constant fear that changing politics could see the state withdraw its support for the PSE. Even by its own figures, the overwhelmingly biggest customer for the PSE was the government. Much of this was for primary school uniforms and catering for preschools—two categories of government procurement that nobody was talking about eliminating.

Even so, IEPS staff were constantly pushing PSE enterprises to try and break into the private market. PSE actors themselves lamented to me that they had wasted a “bonanza” of favourable government policy, and that if policies changed soon, they would be in trouble. Since I have left the field, even with the election of right-wing president Guillermo Lasso, my contacts in Ecuador have told me that policy for the IEPS is largely unchanged. They have just enough money to pay staff, but no more. The procurement programs that existed in 2018 are still running. They run workshops whenever they can (Covid has, of course, been difficult in that regard), but things are still on edge.

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In some ways, my work is a response to Millar’s call for more scholars to bridge the ontological experience of precarity and precarity as a labour condition.¹² I argue that the experience of precarity among IEPS staff, in both their careers and work, helped create an affective attraction for microentrepreneurial strategies and the private market itself. They were not just encouraging entrepreneurialism in PSE actors. Many staff had side hustles, were constantly working on themselves as collections of marketable skills (Gershon 2016; Martin 2000), or both.

In an example of this remaking of the self, Matilde was an IEPS staff member who was also part of a PSE association. I discuss her venture more in Chapter Three, but they were a small group who sold packets of dried fruit from leftover local production. It was a small enterprise that was unlikely to ever generate a lot of income, and she explicitly stated that she was a member in order to be a part of the PSE.

“How can a functionary promote the PSE when they have never been a part of an association or a cooperative, when they don’t know how hard it is to work with such a diversity of thoughts, of feelings?” she asked rhetorically.

The association was never going to earn enough to replace her primary income. Instead, she felt it was important to be part of an association so she could understand the issues faced by the PSE actors she advised.

In another example, a different member of the IEPS owned a plot of land to the north of Quito with her husband. They grew some fruit without using chemicals and sold the excess to a local organic food store. When I visited, the day’s pickings netted them about six dollars—enough for an

¹² For examples, see: Alison (2013), Berlant (2011), Lorey and Derieg (2015), Molé (2010), and Muehlebach and Shoshan (2012).

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expensive lunch in Quito. This was not a profitable enterprise. Instead, it was her way of trying to be a part of the PSE. In both cases, the strategy was to launch a microenterprise.

These were not enterprises for serious income generation. They were projects of self-making (Freeman 2014). My argument ties in with the works of others who highlight how the precarity and instability of neoliberalism can be experienced positively, whether as a form of freedom (Sopranozetti 2017), control over one's time (Millar 2018), or a form of affective self-realisation (Freeman 2014). In essence, I argue that entrepreneurialism, as well as being an adaptive strategy to a situation of perceived precarity, was also a matter of self-realisation as effective government functionaries for IEPS staff. This was both a way for IEPS staff to form themselves into PSE actors as well as tie themselves into an emerging middle class of globally oriented, socially conscious consumers (Brown 2013).

At the same time, IEPS bureaucrats ported the same logics and values, in large part shaped through the precarity of their employment, into their work. While Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld (2015) are absolutely correct to highlight the commitment of a succession of Ecuadorian governments to entrepreneurial logics of innovation and artisanal production, in this thesis I draw attention to how entrepreneurialism is promoted by the state, not only through explicit government policy but through the less direct, though no less important, actions of functionaries tasked with realising policy. Precarity is not only made through policy but is recreated through the actions of bureaucrats as they respond to precarity in their own lives.

Methodology

My research was conducted over twelve months—one month in late 2017 and the rest in 2018. I had also done a small amount of research with the IEPS for my master's degree in Development Studies back in 2015, although, as mentioned in the opening vignette, few of the same staff remained. My

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fieldwork was, in some ways, multi-sited. The bulk of my time was spent talking to and shadowing IEPS staff; however, because I was studying the realisation of policy from academic theory through to its materialisation in the lives of program beneficiaries, I talked to diverse groups. I spoke to academics and helped organise small seminars on PSE theory. I talked to many members of officially registered PSE enterprises, recording many of these conversations as semi-structured interviews. I spent time with NGO staff, who worked promoting the PSE in a similar role to IEPS staff. Finally, I also conducted a 400-respondent survey of consumers of PSE products.

Of the many people I spoke to across these diverse groups, the vast majority understood the PSE through an economic substantivist lens—the economy was not just about profit and loss in the marketplace but for provisioning the reproduction of social units, such as the family. This had a profound effect on my analysis, as examining their views and actions through a substantivist economic framework—one of the staples of the economic anthropology toolkit—would have been highly recursive. People were saying exactly what economic substantivists expect, in large part because they had been influenced by the same theorists.

Rather than engaging in an exercise of verification—seeing how the practices of PSE proponents compare to the works of alternative economy theorists—I take a step back and treat the PSE itself as an ethnographic site. Rather than an already always existing economy, I examine the PSE as a policy framework, site of labour, and social network. The IEPS's lack of resources meant that they constantly had to seek support from other groups and were almost never able to act on their own. To trace the network the IEPS forged, I followed the example of Tate (2015, 5), in her research on US foreign policy, and treated the PSE as an “ambiguous discursive scaffolding” that served to “[provide] an appearance of institutional coherence and consensus among disparate programs”. I use ‘policy framework’ in the broadest sense that includes formal legislation and policy directions, the informal

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practices of IEPS staff, the reactions of other stakeholders to those practices, and the relationships that develop amidst that extensive network. In this way, at the same time as the PSE was the subject of my investigation, as a set of policy directions, it also stitched my various fieldsites together as a site of enquiry in and of itself. I followed the policy. Following the wide variety of actors the IEPS interacted with helped me see this network, both as it functioned and as it ruptured, and how the PSE's status as an alternative was perpetually precarious.

By treating the PSE as an ethnographic site, I am able to put economic anthropology in conversation with approaches to political anthropology that examine the subjectivities of the bureaucrats tasked with policy realisation (Ansell 2014; Ellison 2018; Lea 2008; Nading 2017). In particular, I build on approaches to economic performativity that primarily focus on discourse and highlight the more affective dimensions of constructing economies.¹³ Given the state's central role in formatting economies and the essential role bureaucrats play in this process, my work demonstrates how governmental action in fostering an economy is not simply a function of policy decisions, but is deeply influenced by the lived experiences of the functionaries tasked with carrying out policy. The alternative economy created by the state is only as alternative as bureaucrats understand it to be. For this reason, while I followed a policy network, the majority of my time was spent with IEPS staff.

Zone 9 was the team I spent the most time with. They were the local team in charge of Pichincha. Home to the capital, Quito, Pichincha is one of the wealthiest and most populous provinces in Ecuador, although it also contains substantial rural and urban poverty. Being located in the heart of

¹³ Key economic performativity theorists I build off include Callon (2007), Holmes (2014), and MacKenzie (2006), though they deal less with affect. Appel (2017) and Miyazaki (2013) are two key sources that incorporate affect into their work on economic performativity.

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Ecuador's Andes, Pichincha is also home to strong Indigenous political movements and is known for Indigenous economic practices.¹⁴ This was significant for my fieldwork because, as discussed in Chapter One, the PSE's history contains a strong and yet obscured Indigenous influence.

I followed Zone 9 as they held meetings with other organisations to try and garner resources, made tours of the local governments of Pichincha to see if there were opportunities to run projects together, and ran workshops to train potential actors in the theory and bureaucratic requirements of the PSE. By following the many projects Zone 9 attempted to run, I came to understand the stop-start momentum of running a precarious bureaucracy. Similar to Bornstein's (2005, 39) experience of researching Christian development organisations, "the space of inquiry was lived in reference to elsewhere". Almost wherever I was or whoever I was talking to, the discussion was always about exciting projects happening, or just about to start, elsewhere. Whether it was on the other side of the country or just a department over in Pichincha, the action always appeared to be happening somewhere else. After some early panic and attempts to chase projects around Pichincha, I came to realise that rather than being a question of location, this was a question around temporality (something I unpack further in Chapter Two).

Most potential projects failed to get out of the initial planning stages. The relevant IEPS team member would be moved on, someone in the liaising institution would switch jobs, or the funds that were initially available would be rescinded. A project that just made it past planning would suddenly be put on hold indefinitely for any one of myriad miscellaneous reasons. Then a project I had thought was never going to happen would see a little burst of energy, only to be shelved once more as it hit

¹⁴ For an excellent discussion of past and contemporary Indigenous economic practices see: Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld (2015) and Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009).

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another roadblock. After much frustration and anxiety about constantly following failed projects, I came to see that finding the ‘successful’ project was a fantasy. Instead, the near-constant ‘failure’ was one of the key dynamics of the PSE in Ecuador—much of the labour of PSE proponents was expended on simply trying to sustain the PSE as a viable alternative in people’s minds. As has been repeatedly emphasised in the anthropological literature on development and policy more broadly, rather than being an objective fact, success is socially constructed (Ferguson 1994; Latour 1996; Mosse 2005; Tate 2015). So, too, is failure. Consequently, I focused my research on the labour of IEPS staff, including the many hours they spent on failing and failed projects.

In following the work of IEPS staff in conjunction with the projects they ran, even stalled ones, I was able to get a better sense of the stop-start rhythms with which staff worked. Observing intermittent bursts of energy that were most often then curtailed highlighted the importance of flexibility among IEPS staff and the constantly felt need to seize whatever opportunities arose. Where following one or two specific projects in depth would have emphasised the effects on projects of constantly shifting personnel, following staff themselves in greater depth allowed me to get more of a sense of their experience of constantly shifting projects. Paying close attention to the work of IEPS bureaucrats brought home how the wider experiences of precarity in their own lives and careers carried over into their work.

Speaking to program beneficiaries, NGO staff, local government officials, and IEPS staff from other departments highlighted how almost all of them were experiencing precarity in different but interrelated ways, often due to a not unreasonable fear of the central government withdrawing support. Again, following the PSE as a policy network revealed an interrelated web of precarity—the same one that stitched my fieldsites together. By tracing networks of potential projects and focusing on the actual labour of IEPS staff, even if very few projects came to fruition, I was able to see how these diverse

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experiences of precarity, while distinct, served to reinforce one another. Just as IEPS staff unsure of ongoing employment made sure to have a side hustle, they also encouraged program beneficiaries to move their PSE enterprise into the private market. In another example, the many divergent commitments of PSE actors meant consistently attending a program was a challenge; this made the work of IEPS staff difficult and therefore their careers more precarious.

Treating the PSE as an ethnographic site, with the IEPS located at its centre, allowed me to observe how instability rippled outward to reinforce itself. As people reacted to the lack of certainty in others by constantly seeking opportunities in the short term, the status of the PSE as an economic alternative became increasingly precarious.

Chapters

Chapter 1: Disrupting the Status Quo

Here I describe the political events, particularly decades of protest by Indigenous and leftist groups, that led up to the 2008 constitution—the first legal document to mention the PSE. I show how this history played an important role in the formation of the PSE, while also being erased in subsequent discourse. I then link this to how the IEPS tried to construct the PSE as a development paradigm. Aside from establishing some context for both the IEPS and the PSE as a whole, in this chapter I lay the groundwork for my argument around how the emphasis on resistance and being an alternative created resonances with entrepreneurial ideals of disruption and seizing opportunities.

Chapter 2: Precarity, Quality, and Temporality

In Chapter Two, I take a closer look at the myriad logics that surrounded the PSE as public policy. The IEPS had to operate across highly bureaucratic domains and extremely informal economies. I examine how IEPS staff reconciled the diverging logics of these domains through the concept of

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needing to “aprovechar las oportunidades” or seize opportunities. Borrowing from Guyer’s (2007) work on the temporalities of neoliberalism, I argue that this was both a response to the short time horizons of government functionaries and PSE actors, and a creation of further short-termism. This “aprovechar las oportunidades” was, in a sense, the other side of the coin to the precarity of the situation for all concerned—it was precarity cast in a positive light.

Chapter 3: Socially Responsible PSE Entrepreneurs

In the third chapter, I build on the sense of seizing opportunities and look at how IEPS staff did this in their own lives—particularly in the form of having their own ‘side hustles’. This overlaps with their position as middle-class Ecuadorians, particularly of a left-leaning orientation. Here I put Dávila’s (2016) work on Latin America’s emerging middle-classes into conversation with literature on the role of Fair Trade production, particularly coffee (Brown 2013), in creating a self-consciously global and socially aware class identity. I show how this process of self-formation on the part of IEPS staff and other PSE proponents, in turn, affected how they shaped the PSE, particularly in their desire for ‘quality’.

Chapter 4: Slow Collective Effervescence

In Chapter Four, I examine the affective dimensions of the roll-out of PSE policy. My focus is on ‘slow collective effervescence’ and the concept of ‘articulation’. In essence, the IEPS, without funding, political backing, stability, etc., in order to try and cohere as an organisation, needed staff to feel like a coherent group—to identify as part of a wider PSE policy circle. At the same time, again due to the lack of support, IEPS staff could not be dogmatic. They needed to cooperate with many other policy actors with different visions of what the PSE was and could be, and they lacked either the funding to support their own visions or the authority to enforce them. All they could do was convince.

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Consequently, I argue that the IEPS engaged in a different style of bureaucratic action to mechanistic depictions of bureaucrats offloading interpretive labour onto others. Instead, IEPS staff worked in a style I describe as ‘articulation’, in which they focused on changing their own mentalities to better interact with other stakeholders.

Chapter 5: Articulating the PSE

In Chapter Five, I focus on the concept of *valor agregado* (added value). Adding value was central to how the IEPS understood its role in promoting the PSE. At the same time, exactly how it added value to the alternative economy was not always clear. Building on the concept of ‘articulation’ from the previous chapter, I argue that the key contribution of the IEPS to improve the value of the PSE was to create a network of actors to whom the PSE mattered. To do so, staff mediated between different sets of logics—the rigidity of state bureaucracy, the flexibility of microentrepreneurial ventures, and the social values that underpin the PSE. I argue that as this mediation occurred, both the economic logics and social values became changed in the process. What was originally an act of wealth redistribution was categorised as an opportunity for an enterprise. Moving into the private market became an act of solidarity, as it freed space in government programs for others to benefit.

Chapter 6: Precarious Associativity

The final chapter zooms out to look at the form of PSE as a whole encouraged by the IEPS. I note how it was both social and individualistic. PSE actors and IEPS staff had different understandings of the qualities necessary to be a part of an association. The concept of kinship was a particular tension. I examine how the form of “associativity” promoted by IEPS staff reflected their own work patterns—a focus on non-hierarchical relations in which individuals could come and go with minimal disruption. This, in turn, significantly affected how the PSE was realised as a materially existing economy.

Conclusion

This thesis contributes to a growing literature on the affective appeal of various logics typically associated with neoliberalism. I take inspiration from recent writings on Mutant Neoliberalism, although I stop short of labelling the PSE one of neoliberalism's "own mutant progeny" (Callison and Manfredi 2020, 3). Nonetheless, I take heed of Callison & Manfredi's warning that neoliberalism is not a monolithic ideology and instead takes multiple mutating forms—as an intellectual and political project, a program of economic governance, a form of normative reason, and an order of material production. I take this a step further and think we can break these down into logics, or at least sets of logics, that can spread, compete, take root, or wither and die.

Breaking down neoliberal logics to this level highlights that trying to work out whether an alternative economy like the PSE is or is not a form of neoliberalism is a red herring. It is a tempting path, but ultimately, 'neoliberalism' is a word used by diverse actors, including my interlocutors, to label a set of economic and political logics and practices. The question is how they propagate, what their effects are, and how they change as they go. Precarity is essential to the spread of many of these logics, and my research highlights the central role of the state in said logics. Importantly, I demonstrate that this is not just through high-level policy discourse, but through the lived experiences of government functionaries who enact policy.

In the case of the PSE in Ecuador, the precarity experienced by government functionaries, PSE actors, and others created a condition in which many logics associated with neoliberal entrepreneurialism appeared as sensible courses of action, even to those who positioned themselves as being against capitalism. This was not through any self-deception or false consciousness. Instead, in the context created by neoliberal logics such as labour flexibility and individual responsibility,

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entrepreneurial strategies of innovation and opportunism appeared to IEPS staff as the best strategies for successful PSE promotion.

In focusing on IEPS staff, my thesis also contributes to a growing literature on the lifeworlds of bureaucrats and their strategies to realise policy under circumstances of relatively limited state capacity (e.g., Ansell 2014; Cooper 2019; Nading 2017; Street 2012). As far back as Lipsky's (2010 [1980]) work on *Street Level Bureaucrats*, the importance of frontline government staff in the realisation of policy has been acknowledged. At the same time, it also appears to be consistently underestimated, with new policy paradigms, such as the roll-out of the neoliberal state, often portrayed as exclusively impositions from above. In the quest to create an alternative economy by the Ecuadorian state, it is ultimately the labour of government functionaries that makes policy "real" in the lives of people. In the case of the PSE, how IEPS staff understood the political context, how they viewed economic success, and how they understood the social values of the PSE all contributed to their actions. Their perspectives greatly affected the realisation of the PSE as they tried to turn it from academic discourse into government policy and, ultimately, into a materially existing economy.

Importantly, given the precarity of the PSE as a policy platform and the scarcity of resources, IEPS staff had to operate through alternative avenues to more typical mechanistic depictions of bureaucracy. Instead, they tried to convince others to join in the political project of the PSE through affective pulls. They attempted to "orient" (Nading 2017) other stakeholders to see the world in a different way so that their interests would hopefully align. Of course, the perspectives of IEPS staff shifted in the process.

Ultimately, my thesis is about how the idea of an alternative economy was kept alive, even as external support for it waned. Like the anti-neoliberal volunteers working in austerity-ridden Greece studied by Cabot (2016, 163), IEPS staff and other PSE proponents worked to "[sustain] partial

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alternative worlds within intolerable systems”. In examining the PSE as a precarious alternative, I emphasise not just the political and economic actions of bureaucrats as policy actors, but the work they had to put in to try and ensure the PSE was an alternative. I do not dismiss the concerns of those who, like Gago (2017, esp. 7), see progressive governments’ promotion of various forms of solidarity economies as recreating and reinforcing the exploitative tendencies of the neoliberal economic reform of the 1990s. As emphasised throughout this thesis, there are strong similarities between the underlying logics of the PSE and the very economic restructuring to which the PSE was a reaction. Nevertheless, to understand the overlap between neoliberalism and alternative economic policy, we must pay attention to those tasked with creating and shaping those alternative economies. After all, it is in large part *their* understanding of what makes an economy alternative that determines its logics and values.

ONE

Disrupting the Status Quo

“Because of that, people of the Oriente are poor,” lamented Germán, “Because of petroleum.”

It was the fourth session of a 40-hour workshop on leadership in the Popular Solidarity Economy (PSE), and Germán’s words appeared to both shock and resonate with his audience. I heard the man next to me whisper “Damn ...” under his breath, apparently surprised by the idea that petroleum could bring poverty. Although the topic for the day’s workshop was ‘local development’, Germán’s presentation was geared toward convincing his audience that there were certain types of development they did *not* want in their communities.

The workshop was part of a pilot program from the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS) called “PSE Schools”. Whereas in the past the institute had run many one-off workshops, they were piloting a series of 40-hour courses. This particular one ran over six sessions, once per week, in conjunction with the National Federation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Black Organisations. The Federation is an umbrella political organisation that brings together other, smaller political groups. As discussed later in this chapter, the Federation has had a fluctuating relationship with the Correa and later Moreno governments, and by extension the IEPS, at times being one of the more amenable Indigenous political organisations and at others fiercely protesting government action. Attendees were a variety of representatives of member organisations or, in a few cases, just interested

individual Federation members. They were primarily campesinos¹⁵ from towns outside Quito, although a few were members of small organisations in the capital itself. After an initial attendance of over thirty, there were around twenty people who came to subsequent sessions. Most weeks, there were only twelve to fifteen present, as a few people missed each week. At the end of the course, a small party was held and attendees received a certificate. Though similar to Ellison's (2018, esp. 199–204) observations of NGO training in Bolivia, rather than being forms of accreditation, certificates appeared to be stored away as material evidence of “good conduct” and being a proactive, engaged citizen, ready to be invested in by government or NGOs.

This particular session was being run by Germán, the head of the local IEPS team. ‘Local development’ in this context was not specific to Quito, but a question of scale—what development meant for a local community in comparison to the nation. Instead of describing what local development was, however, Germán spent a lot more time describing what it was not. His discussion moved from Nestlé purchasing milk from towns just to the North of Quito, to the petroleum industry in the east, to banana plantations on the coast, and even to flower exporters located around Quito, each discussed in the context of what such ‘development’ looked like from the perspective of locals.

¹⁵ Traditionally translated as ‘peasant’, the word ‘campesino’ can at times be both broader (in the sense of referring to rural people in general) and more specific (in often being associated with a political identity emphasising land ownership and other concerns of smallholder farmers). As an identity, it also interacts with conceptions of being Indigenous—at times the identities overlap and are at other times in opposition. Among the majority of my interlocutors, and for the sake of this thesis, ‘campesino’ primarily refers to smallholder farmers, especially those who identify with movements for the redistribution of land, who may or may not be Indigenous. It is worth noting, as discussed in later chapters, that few campesinos derive the entirety of their income from farming and, especially among the extended household, are often involved in a host of income-generating activities.

Rather than discussing what local development could or ought to look like, in each of these examples, he critiqued what was currently happening at the hands of large corporations. Examples of successful local development or what those present could do were left largely unaddressed.

In this chapter, I explore some of the consequences of this negative definition of the goals of the PSE—how it was primarily defined through what it was not—and how this meant the PSE was built upon structures of feeling that resonated with modern entrepreneurial logics. The PSE has a very different history to that of Silicon Valley-style entrepreneurialism. At the same time, as discussed throughout the thesis, almost everyone involved in and around the PSE—IEPS and other government staff, NGOs, and producers themselves—implicitly or explicitly made reference to concepts, ideas, and models from the entrepreneurialism of the tech industry. In this chapter, I focus on how both the PSE and Silicon Valley-style entrepreneurialism share assumptions of a need to disrupt current economic practices, often as embodied by Big Business, and a lack of confidence in the state to manage the economy. I argue that without references to what the PSE was *for*, primarily as embodied in the history of Indigenous and leftist political mobilisation that led up to the formation of the PSE, this affective inclination toward disrupting the economic status quo left its proponents primed to adopt entrepreneurial logics.

After describing the negative definition of the PSE that was a common practice of proponents, I discuss the place of disruption within modern entrepreneurialism. I examine entrepreneurialism in greater depth in Chapter Three. Here, I use the term to describe a set of economic logics based around innovation, disrupting existing markets, and constant change. After discussing disruption, I then examine a speech by the vice-president of Ecuador, who was an important figure in PSE promotion at the time, to show the types of language and affective strategies used by proponents in constructing the PSE. This is followed by a brief discussion of the academic literature on economic performativity

and Raymond William's use of the term "structures of feeling" in order to demonstrate the importance of language and history in the construction of economies. I then delve into the history of anti-neoliberal protest that was obliquely referenced by the vice-president and the structures of feeling she mobilised. I conclude by highlighting the overlap between the underlying logics of the PSE as promoted by the IEPS and modern entrepreneurialism.

The PSE was not simply modern entrepreneurialism in a different guise. They were sufficiently similar, however, that, as proponents encountered difficulties in promoting alternative economics they sometimes and unexpectedly slipped between the logics of entrepreneurialism and the PSE. The neoliberal reforms of the 1990s and early 2000s led to the creation of the IEPS, while at the same time creating the precarity that typified the employment of many of its staff. A constantly shifting roster within the institute also contributed to the institutional amnesia by which the anti-neoliberal Indigenous movements were quietly left out of the history of the PSE. At the same time, without the history of that resistance, economic logics by which entrepreneurialism was valorised easily came to the fore, in turn reinforcing the precarity of staff. Without an institutional memory, it became much easier for IEPS staff to consider the PSE less as an alternative economy and more as a form of entrepreneurialism for the left-leaning.

Against Big Business

To help his audience see the need to shift away from large-scale endeavours, Germán moved from the example of petroleum in the east to that of the flower trade around Quito. Over recent decades, Ecuador has become a major exporter of cut flowers, with much of the industry based in towns an hour or two from the capital. Many of the participants at the *capacitación* were from those areas. Germán

was able to leverage their experiences of the flower industry to drive his point home. He did this by asking a series of questions of his audience.

“Do the [flower] exporters own the land?” he asked.

Someone in the audience said they did.

“I hope they’re from Cayambe,” he replied. Cayambe is one of the towns central to the industry. Several attendees were from outlying communities. “What about irrigation?” he asked. But before anyone could respond, Germán answered his own question, “They consume what they can. Do they pay?”

A Cayambe local said they paid a little. This money went to the central state, and, for Germán, this counted as a small benefit. “Well, it’s something,” he replied. Switching topics, he asked if there were chemicals. “So there are illnesses, no?” Germán asked the audience. Before anyone could respond, he continued. “So they pass the bill onto the Social Security, for lung, skin, and stomach cancer. Who pays?”

“Social Security,” replied an audience member.

“Everyone,” corrected Germán.

This back-and-forth continued for several minutes, covering topics including employment and electricity use. It culminated in Germán asking how those few employed at the greenhouses spent their money. Did they buy cows or make other local investments? The audience said they didn’t.

“They buy vehicles, domestic appliances,” he continued. “The money doesn’t stay in Cayambe. They leave the land contaminated. Therefore, the flowers don’t leave anything. Better they hadn’t come,” he concluded.

This got a round of nervous laughter from the audience, and they cast a few uncomfortable glances toward one another. They had all been actively engaged in earlier parts of Germán’s

presentation, and his explanations of the exploitation of Big Business definitely resonated with those present. Nevertheless, it seemed the group as a whole was not ready to simply cast out large industry from their midst, even if they were able to.

The tension quickly dissipated as Germán began to quiz audience members about what industries there were in their local area. Even so, the awkward pause revealed the gap that the IEPS was attempting to bridge. The idea that the big businesses currently operating throughout Ecuador were the key to economic prosperity was constantly undermined by the IEPS, both at the workshop and other events. Germán was most scathing of the petroleum industry.

“They extract, they suck (*chupan*), and they leave. And it’s temporary,” were his exact words.

He was, at best, ambivalent toward other industries. In the case of Nestlé, a major buyer of milk in the local region, Germán noted that they invested in better livestock for the area and provided some machinery. Relative to other industries, according to him, Nestlé at least added some sort of value to the region.¹⁶ Although he did emphasise that by being the only customer in some regions, they offered terrible prices to their suppliers.

In these talks and at other presentations, IEPS staff consistently associated Big Business and the status quo with the problems the audience and Ecuador as a whole were facing. Implicitly, the solution came from small, local enterprises, though this was rarely stated explicitly. Similar to the observations of Weiss (2016) around the creation of a market for heritage pigs in the United States,

¹⁶ Germán’s typification of the different industries and particular disdain for those that appeared to simply “extract ... and leave” resonates with Hirsch’s (2022) account of “extractive care” in Peru, where the provision of better breeding stock by local mining companies was seen as a way to care for the local community, offset the impact of the mine, and, ultimately, retain a social licence to extract further resources.

Germán's critique of Big Business, especially his emphasis on non-local ownership, worked to create the 'local' as the true site of value creation and of material products. What specifically made something local was never explored; however, there was an implicit assumption that local ownership implied permanence, rather than the foreign owners (often from another department of Ecuador) who came in, sucked up anything valuable, and left.

The importance of the PSE to these processes of local development was primarily by not being Big Business. What the PSE was and its relation to local development was never explored in depth. When I asked IEPS staff and other proponents what the PSE was, the response typically involved lists of progressive values, such as reciprocity, equality, being in harmony with nature, solidarity, etc. Conducting research in the same context, Nelms (2015b) reported similar responses, also noting that this style of language, in which concepts were defined through long, non-hierarchical lists of values, was also reflected in official documents relating to the PSE. When I asked for practical examples of the PSE, my interlocutors sometimes spoke of various "emblematic examples" of the PSE, such as Camari and Salinerito (two large brands well known for being part of the solidarity economy) or traditional practices such as *minga* (a traditional Andean form of collective work). More commonly, and especially in presentations where they were not explicitly asked to offer examples of the PSE, IEPS staff and other proponents tended to describe the PSE by what it was not (e.g., capitalism, Big Business, and bad for the environment), often through reference to industries and businesses that were perceived to be exploitative, extractive, destroying the environment, etc.

Anthropologists studying diverse forms of alternative economics have noted that proponents often primarily define their alternative by what it is against, rather than what it is for (e.g., Maurer 2005; Nelms 2015b; B. Weiss 2016). The goal of these alternatives is the disruption of the current way of doing things. The desire of PSE proponents to disrupt the status quo, especially as embodied by

established Big Businesses, was reminiscent of “disruption” coming out of Silicon Valley-style entrepreneurialism, including criticism of Big Business and an associated mistrust of government. Typical targets of critique in Ecuador were the petrochemical industry, flower exporters, Nestlé, and the major supermarket chains, though often simply capitalism itself was held to blame. There was also mistrust of government on the part of PSE proponents.

Rather than government tamping down on individual freedom and being the “road to serfdom” (Hayek and Caldwell 2007), the mistrust of PSE proponents was instead related to political stability—government functionaries, NGO staff, and PSE actors themselves were constantly fearful that the government would withdraw its support and funding for the PSE. Consequently, while IEPS staff often touted the essential role of government during workshops, at the same time, they constantly encouraged PSE enterprises to move into the private market and gain a level of independence from the government, should the worst occur. In the next section, before taking a closer look at the discourse and history of the PSE, I briefly discuss the role of ‘disruption’ in modern entrepreneurialism, particularly in the forms associated with Silicon Valley.

Disruption

‘Disruption’ was not a term I heard during my fieldwork, nor was there a clear equivalent referenced. In discussing disruption, rather than arguing that it was somehow essential to the formation of the PSE, I instead want to highlight both how many people employed to promote the PSE used the language of Silicon Valley in their work and how the PSE shared several fundamental assumptions with modern entrepreneurialism, particularly as it is embodied in the tech industry. At times, the similarity between forms of the PSE promoted by the IEPS and Silicon Valley entrepreneurialism was explicit and intentional, such as when one IEPS program aimed at supporting PSE enterprises used

Business Model Canvas. This is a template for developing new business models that comes straight out of the tech start-up industry and encourages owners to consider their enterprises from the perspective of specific building blocks, including “customer segments”, “value propositions”, and “revenue streams”. Similarly, the head of the PSE department at ConQuito—an important organisation also responsible for promoting PSE enterprises—emphasised that a large part of the role of her team was to impress upon PSE actors that innovation was not just for the tech industry.

More broadly, however, I argue that despite a radically distinct history, the PSE and Silicon Valley entrepreneurialism shared at least two key characteristics—an aspiration to disrupt entrenched market incumbents, or at least their business practices, and a mistrust of government. These two logics differed in their realisation between the PSE and modern conceptions of entrepreneurialism; however, they were sufficiently similar that it made the PSE, in its realisation as an alternative economy promoted by the IEPS and other proponents, fertile soil for other entrepreneurial logics. In this section, I examine entrepreneurial conceptions of ‘disruption’, highlighting its similarities to the ideas of PSE proponents around how both moral worth and economic value can be found in disrupting mainstream economic systems, especially as embodied by large corporations.

When it comes to the explicit use of the term ‘disruption’, Geiger (2020) notes that despite its frequent use in popular and business discourse, especially in relation to the tech industry, it remains under-theorised. Popularised in the business world by management consultant Clayton Christensen (Bower and Christensen 1995; Christensen 2003), the term itself relates back to Schumpeter’s idea of ‘creative destruction’ (Geiger 2020; Hogarth 2017)—how economic and technological progress is supposedly powered through cycles of entrepreneurial innovation and the destruction of old economic structures (Schumpeter 2010 [1943]). Although he himself did not use the term ‘disruption’,

Schumpeter saw these cycles eventually undermining the foundations of capitalism itself and bringing about its demise.¹⁷

For his part, Christensen popularised the concept of ‘disruptive innovation’, though he later argued that many people misunderstand and misuse the concept. As highlighted by Geiger (2020), Hogarth (2017), and Christensen himself (2015), in common usage, ‘disruption’ has largely been shorn from ‘innovation’, with most simply using the words ‘disruption’ and ‘disruptors’. Consequently, “disruptive innovation is now a signifier that has floated free of its original conceptual mooring” (Hogarth 2017, 258), and often only loosely invokes the concept of innovation in the traditional sense. As a consequence, Hogarth (2017) argues that in the entrepreneurial culture of Silicon Valley, ‘disruption’ comes to mediate the relationship between moral worth and economic value. Building on this, Geiger (2020) makes the case that disruption has become almost a religious mantra in and around Silicon Valley that has, in turn, become the basis for a set of eschatological narratives. In a turn that is distinct from and yet reminiscent of the short and long-term time horizons I discuss in Chapter Three, Geiger argues this focus on disruption, apart from turning the concept into an almost axiomatic good, has the effect of creating extreme uncertainty in the short term while narrowing down the long term into one inevitable future, in which technology saves us all from the world’s ills.

While precisely what is being disrupted by entrepreneurs varies greatly, in almost all cases the prime positive attribute of disruption appears to be the rupture to entrenched business practices, particularly as embodied in Big Business. The actual practices of entrepreneurs with regard to

¹⁷ Schumpeter’s demise-of-capitalism thesis is actually largely a defence of capitalism and critique of anti-capitalist professional classes. Rather than defining the inevitable end of capitalism, Schumpeter is sounding the alarm for those with pro-capitalist sympathies.

monopolies is complicated, with many leaders of start-ups often criticising large established businesses while aspiring to establish effective monopolies themselves (Geiger 2020; Hogarth 2017).¹⁸ Nevertheless, their discourse uses the perceived power of established economic players as both the source of economic value for their enterprise and moral justification for disruption. As emphasised by Chong (2018) in her ethnography of management consultants—for those attempting to reform economic practices, restructuring ethics goes hand-in-hand with restructuring conceptions of economic value. Following Graeber (2001), she argues that because social values and economic values are refractions of the same thing, to change one you must change the other. IEPS staff, similar to the management consultants Chong studied, were “concerned with the creation of a legitimate ethical project” by which, in the case of the PSE, economic activity and labour were restructured and revalued. Disrupting Big Business meant disrupting the ethical structures that made Big Business acceptable. As discussed later, while the PSE may not be established in an explicit discourse of ‘disruption’, due to its relationship to a history of popular protest against established economic powers and practices, there are resonances between it and modern entrepreneurial logics.

The other key element shared between the PSE and modern entrepreneurialism is a mistrust of government. Many of the political antecedents of the PSE stem from groups objecting to the

¹⁸ It is also worth noting that the modern form of large corporations is itself the result of earlier capitalist disruptions. In her excellent analysis, Ho (2009) demonstrates how current precarious employment practices in large part stem from the shareholder revolution of the 1980s, in which many large companies were taken over, broken up, and then sold off, all in the name of shareholder value. The corporations that Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and PSE proponents want to disrupt were themselves the result of significant earlier disruptions, even if that was not the terminology of the 1980s.

withdrawal of the state and the neoliberalisation of Ecuador. At the same time, those groups (both academics and social movements) themselves have had troubled relations with the state. While calling for further state intervention, they have also often found themselves in conflict with the national government. A common refrain from PSE proponents, bureaucrats, academics, and NGO staff alike was that the government should not lead the development of the PSE, society should, and that the government should instead support that development. This was expressed in a common critique of the realisation of the PSE in Ecuador—that the government was leading when it should be following. One academic who specialised in PSE theory and practice, during an informal conversation, told me he thought that was a mistake of the Correa government—they had employed many specialists in solidarity economy theory and others who lead solidarity economy organisations. In doing so, the government inadvertently co-opted them. Rather than the society leading the government, by employing PSE leaders, the government was now attempting to lead the PSE. Across the vast majority of my interlocutors, even many of those working in government, this approach was seen as a mistake.

The tension between the government and proponents was further heightened as support was slowly withdrawn for the PSE. This is a topic that I discuss throughout this thesis; however, in short, the inability to rely on ongoing support from the government was a large factor in the constant pressure from IEPS staff and other proponents for PSE enterprises to move into the private market. This is not the same as the mistrust of government to manage economic and societal matters that is common in both entrepreneurial circles and in neoliberal discourses more broadly. Nevertheless, PSE proponents' fears of government abandonment, while stemming from a very different history to Silicon Valley entrepreneurialism, created a resonance between the two in which proponents of both the PSE and entrepreneurialism saw the greatest chance at long-term success as being in the private

market. PSE proponents were therefore primed for further entrepreneurial logics, such as the importance of having a value-added proposition or innovation.

To understand how the history of the PSE left proponents primed to adopt entrepreneurial logics, I will examine the social movements and intellectual traditions that led to its creation. Before examining that, however, I take a closer look at the discourse of the PSE and how it obliquely referenced decades of Indigenous protest while, at the same time, erasing that history. This left the PSE with an affective stance that was opposed to mainstream economic systems, but without the specific demands of those movements that would pin the PSE to being an alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

The Constitutional Economy

María Alejandra Vicuña, the vice-president of Ecuador, was due to give an opening address on the first day of a two-day conference by the Consortium of Autonomous Provincial Governments of Ecuador. The topic was how its members could better engage and promote the PSE. And it was busy.

The conference had been organised just at a time when the IEPS was slated to be transferred from the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion to the office of the vice-president.¹⁹ Vicuña was going to become the highest authority responsible for the promotion of the PSE in Ecuador. So many

¹⁹ While the specifics of why the IEPS was moved to the office of the vice-president were indeterminate, such a move was part of a much longer history throughout Latin America of strong executive arms of government and popular politics, in which leaders both actual and aspiring take direct control of government functions that can potentially distribute benefits to supporters (Skidmore, Smith & Greene 2014). As discussed in Chapter Six, some of my interlocutors speculated that the vice-president was preparing to run for president at the next election and that the IEPS, if properly financed, could become a vehicle for distributing benefits.

people had come to listen that there was not enough space in the auditorium. Instead, I was hustled into a lift and taken, along with several others, into one of two overflow rooms on the eighth floor. It was also nearly full. There were two dozen computers spread around a circle of desks with someone sat at each computer, watching a video feed of what was transpiring below. Another eight or so of us sat around the outside of the room, awkwardly watching over people's shoulders. I later learnt the presentations were even streamed online, which was unusual for PSE conferences while I was in Ecuador. In short, this was a significant event.

Several delegates offered welcomes to the event, including the president of the host organisation, the head of the National Institute of Higher Education, and the vice-president herself. In her speech, Vicuña set out to assert the distinctiveness of the PSE, as well as her government's commitment to supporting the sector. To do so, she stepped through a rapid history commonly told by PSE proponents of how capitalism had become the dominant economic system, effectively erasing other conceptions of the economy, and how alternatives such as cooperativism and mutualism were born in response. She spent substantially more time, however, on how the PSE was recognised in the constitution and how the constitution itself, via the Constituent Assembly at Montecristi, was the result of "the most democratic process in the history of the life of the nation." This was a discursive construction that managed to be both passionate and oblique. It tied the formation of the PSE to decades of Indigenous-led anti-capitalist agitation without mentioning the agitation itself.

Similarly, the language the vice-president used mirrored that of Indigenous political movements of the 1990s and early 2000s without making any explicit reference to them. She noted that key features of the PSE were "solidarity", "reciprocity", and "redistribution" and described a new society that was "just, equitable, and solidary". Vicuña also talked about how the constitution

recognised the economic system as social and solidary, with human beings as subject and end.²⁰ She also described how the economy was a “dynamic and equilibrated” relation between society, the state, and the market, all in harmony with nature, and with the objective of “guaranteeing the necessary production and reproduction of the material and immaterial conditions that constitute Buen Vivir.”²¹

This language is drawn from both the Constitution and the Organic Law of the Popular Solidarity Economy (LOEPS)—the two key pieces of legislation governing the PSE—which themselves included a strong influence from the Indigenous political movements that had been ascendant up to the point of their drafting. In obliquely referencing the massive political struggles leading up to the 2008 Constitution, the vice-president was drawing on structures of feeling associated with disruption of the capitalist status quo and a need for change. At the same time, by not referencing the actual protests, Vicuña left her image of the PSE divorced from any specific demands. In doing so, she was crafting an image of the PSE that at once had resonances with contemporary entrepreneurial logics, but at the same time lacked any firm ideas to counterbalance that affective pull. To fully understand this vision, I will explore the antecedent history of the PSE that the vice-president was indirectly referencing. Before that, however, I examine how economies are created discursively, in order to understand the importance of the language used by proponents in the construction of the PSE.

²⁰ In the context of the PSE in Ecuador, this expression “el ser humano como sujeto y fin” was not intended to assert that the alternative economy was anthropocentric, rather the term “ser humano” (human being) signalled that the economy was to be at the service of a holistic conception of people, rather than at the service of capital.

²¹ Also known as *sumak kawsay* and ‘Good Living’ in English, Buen Vivir is a holistic conception of development that has its origins in Indigenous cosmologies.

Performing Structures of Feeling

Theorists from many disciplines have grappled with whether and how economies are constructed through discourse. That economics does not merely objectively describe a set of already-occurring actions but actively shapes them is rarely disputed in anthropology and sociology (Appel 2017; Callon 2007; Elyachar 2013; Holmes 2014; MacKenzie 2006; Miller 2002; Miyazaki 2013). Instead, key questions form around precisely how economics formats economies. On one level, we can examine the direct effects of language on the formation of economies. This is an approach relatively common in sociocultural studies of finance. MacKenzie (2006), for example, goes to great length to show how the legality of options trading in many parts of the United States hinged on whether or not it could be said to be gambling.

On another level, the discourse of economists and other authority figures can format economies through less direct reference to, or even the embodiment of, values and cultural norms. The vice-president's speech in no way had an impact on the strict definition of the PSE, despite its references to legislation. Instead, by making oblique reference to a series of passionate moments in the Ecuadorian left's anti-capitalist history, her speech was primarily concerned with the second level—leveraging a series of values and cultural norms specific to that particular context. In order to analyse this, I put the concept of economic performativity in conversation with Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling". This allows me to highlight how the vice-president was attempting to form the PSE as an emotive and yet 'safe' alternative to capitalism, with the history of rebellious protest shorn from its own past.

'Performativity' frames several common approaches to the discursive construction of economies (Appadurai 2015; Appel 2017; Callon 2007; Gibson-Graham 2008; Holmes 2014; MacKenzie 2006; Miyazaki 2013). Most theorists who use this frame of reference trace a lineage from

Austin (1962), often via Butler (1990), to Callon (2007, 1998). In this frame, ‘performativity’ refers to language having an impact on the economic process, beyond merely describing it. For many working with the concept of performativity, this can be boiled down to the question of whether and how the discursive constructs of economists (understood broadly as not just academics, but central bankers, advisers, hedge fund managers, etc.) affect the economy (e.g., Appel 2017; Callon 2007; Holmes 2014; MacKenzie 2006; Miller 2002, 2005; Miyazaki 2013).

Much of the work on performativity relates to precise definitions of what is being said. Works on finance, in particular, often reflect this approach. In their writing, these academics describe a world of competing models, in which only those that are best able to realise the worlds they describe succeed and survive, though this success need only be partial (Callon 2007; Holmes 2014; MacKenzie 2006). An example is when the creation of the Black-Scholes-Merton options pricing model appeared to bring options pricing in line with its own expectations as more and more traders began to use the model (MacKenzie 2006).

In the case of the PSE, this would, on the surface, be especially straightforward, as it is an economic concept first theorised by leftist economists that is explicitly being promoted by a government. So, when Coraggio (2011, 166) writes that the construction of an alternate economic system would require relations of “redistribution, reciprocity and solidarity”, similar language finds its way into the definition of the PSE as being “based in relations of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity” (Asamblea Nacional 2018, Art. 1). Importantly, however, there are questions as to the extent to which the statements of economists and, by extension, the legislation are reflected in a material reality (Appel 2017; Miller 2002), as to take them at face value runs the risk of “[following] the economists in mistaking a representation of economic life for its practice” (Miller 2005, 219).

In contrast, in this chapter, I focus upon the more affective dimensions of economic discourse. Here, the emphasis is on how language mobilises particular structures of feeling. Some works that deal with subjectivities and structures of feeling explicitly use performativity as a framework (Appadurai 2015; Appel 2017; Miyazaki 2013); however, examinations of the relationship between economic theory and subjectivity substantially predates the performativity thesis, tracing a lineage back through Marx and Weber, and even (arguably) Aristotle. There are therefore many whose works sit alongside this vein of economic performativity, while not explicitly being of it.

By making reference to Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling", I want to highlight the effects of economic performativity on the unarticulated. Originating in critical theory, the term "structures of feeling" was coined by Williams as a way to try and understand the relationship between literature and society. He describes "structures of feeling" as being "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (1977, 132; see also: 1965). In essence, Williams uses the term to describe the organisation of emotions and values common to a group in a specific context. Importantly, "feeling" does not refer to just emotion but also to thought, albeit potentially unarticulated. In a similar way to how Yanagisako (2002, 10) uses 'sentiments' to "bridge the dichotomy between emotion and thought", Williams describes the 'feeling' in 'structures of feeling' as "thought as felt and feeling as thought" (1977, 132).²² Williams used the concept to describe the importance of

²² Throughout this thesis, I use the terms 'affect', 'affective', and 'affectively' in a similar sense. Rather than focusing on an experience that is "presubjective without being presocial" (Mazzarella, 2009, 291), in talking about affect, I am following Williams (1977) and Yanagisako (2002) in discussing something between thought and emotion. By 'the affective appeal of neoliberalism', for instance, I am talking about a felt attraction to neoliberalism or aspects thereof, even if one cannot quite describe what that attraction is or is perhaps not even entirely aware of it.

literature for articulating alternatives to dominant social paradigms (Filmer 2003). He did not think that structures of feeling were only present in literature, however; he merely thought it was the best place to find and analyse them.

The vice-president's speech was not just an expression of structures of feeling, but a self-conscious mobilisation of them. In order to establish the PSE as a genuine alternative to the dominant capitalist system, the vice-president attempted to channel the passions and attitudes of the largest anti-capitalist movement in Ecuador's recent history when it was at the pinnacle of its influence. She did it, however, without making any specific reference to the passionate protests that lead up to that moment nor their demands, only referencing the Constituent Assembly that was its culmination. In failing to talk about these events, the vice-president erased a history of protest against the state and avoided mentioning powerful political groups—particularly Indigenous organisations—whose cooperation with the Alianza País government had always been fraught and had, in recent years, almost entirely collapsed. To fully understand the implications of shearing off this history of political mobilisation, I next move through a brief history of Ecuador's anti-capitalist politics, particularly its Indigenous heritage.

Popular Anti-neoliberalism

Through decades of protest and political action, as well as a self-conscious positioning against neoliberalism, Ecuador's Indigenous movement has come to be heavily associated with counter-neoliberal politics. Ecuadorian academics, among many others, had often associated indigeneity with anti-modern sentiments (e.g., Martínez 1984; Velasco Abad 1979); however, as the Indigenous movement began to gain political traction in the 1990s (in a wider Latin American context in which Indigenous groups were taking leading roles in counter-neoliberal politics), those same academics

began to conceive of the movement as possibly “the last obstacle toward economic globalisation” (Martínez 1999, 13). This Indigenous resurgence occurred at a crucial, formative moment in relation to the formalisation of the PSE as both an academic construct and a legally defined sector of the economy. The PSE therefore came to be largely defined through its opposition to neoliberalism (Nelms 2015b).

For Western academics, ‘neoliberalism’ is often a broad synonym for capitalism and inequality (Ferguson 1994; D. Harvey 2005). Ecuadorian activists and academics are more likely to use the term ‘capitalism’, rather than ‘neoliberalism’, especially in everyday discourse, both when they are referring to a more specific suite of policies that would commonly be labelled as ‘neoliberalism’ in academic literature and when simply referring to inequality more broadly. In large part, this general use of the term ‘capitalism’ to refer to neoliberal structures is due to Latin America’s central role in the development of neoliberalism as the proving grounds of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and 1990s. For many Latin Americans, the most recent and powerful experiences of capitalism were neoliberalism.²³

This does not mean that Indigenous activists have vague or overly generalised demands, however. At all of the largest protests in the recent history of Ecuador’s Indigenous movement, groups

²³ The Latin American experience of capitalism, especially until the turn of the millennium, was deeply shaped by their role as the testing ground for the theories of the ‘Chicago Boys’—a group of extreme right-wing economists from the University of Chicago, largely credited with implementing the economic ideas of Milton Friedman. Unfortunately under-recognised outside of Latin American literature, the region played a crucial role in the development of modern neoliberalism, as it was one of the first regions where large-scale attempts were made to institute the right-wing economic rationale.

have enunciated clear goals directed against neoliberalism, particularly as a macroeconomic doctrine but also more indirectly as a regime of policies and practices that redistributed wealth toward elites.²⁴ Framers and proponents of the PSE discursively linked the alternative economy to the structures of feeling these movements generated. When attempting to recruit others into the PSE, these were the sentiments that IEPS staff were attempting to channel.

This section, therefore, tracks the contingent alignment of Indigenous politics, particularly in Ecuador and Bolivia, with a growing social scientific knowledge base, both of which aimed to challenge the orthodoxies of neoliberalism. It examines some of the key strands of Indigenous anti-neoliberal thinking as well as its influence on academic and political discussions of the time among theorists, politicians, and even the broader public. This alignment of Indigenous politics and social scientific culture formed the context in which the PSE was formalised and against which the performative aspects of the vice-president's speech need to be read, despite passing unmentioned by the vice-president herself.

Anti-neoliberal Indigeneity

In much of the work on solidarity economics, concepts such as 'solidarity' and 'reciprocity' are conflated with indigeneity and ancestral practices more broadly. Coraggio (2011, 269), whose work forms the basis for much of the thinking on the PSE in Ecuador, wrote that "A socialist project has much to incorporate from the collective modes of acting and thinking of Indigenous peoples". In public writings, Alberto Acosta—who played a major role in the formation of the 2008 constitution—borrowed from Gualinga (2002) to assert that there is no conception of 'development' in Indigenous

²⁴ This distinction is borrowed from Ferguson (2009) and David Harvey (2005).

Ecuadorian societies; that their idea of poverty is not linked to a lack of material goods; and that within their cosmovision, the idea of social improvement includes values of ethical conduct, human values, and being in harmony with nature (e.g., Acosta 2009). Theorists and PSE proponents thus establish indigeneity in opposition to neoliberal principles of individualised success, competitive practices, risk-taking, and the supremacy of the market in general.

The link between these values and indigeneity, as well as their opposition to neoliberalism, are simplified and essentialised in both policy and scholarly debates and are cast as the defining features of alternative economies in Latin America. In linking them, however, PSE proponents lean upon the perceived legitimacy of Indigenous anti-neoliberalism, adding weight to the heterodox economy as an alternative model to neoliberalism.

The protests of 1990 marked a watershed moment in the history of Indigenous political organising in Ecuador. In April of that year, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the country's largest Indigenous organisation, had put out the call to dozens of provincial and local organisations to join a proposed national uprising in early June. In late May, before the official start date, two hundred Indigenous activists had taken over the Santo Domingo Church in Quito and begun a hunger strike. However, it was on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of June that the full political force of Ecuador's Indigenous population was felt, as thousands, potentially hundreds of thousands according to Pallares (2002, 17), "left their fields, hearths, and workplaces... in order to block highways with tree trunks and boulders, shut down commerce, and march on provincial government offices" (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009, 80). Arguably the largest Indigenous uprising in twentieth-century Ecuador, "by most accounts, even CONAIE leaders were astounded by the massive response" (Pallares 2002). Later known as *El Levantamiento* (literally, "The Uprising"), this marked an important moment on a journey

in which Indigenous groups eventually came to position themselves as national defenders for the marginalised in the face of capitalist, neoliberal forces.

Ecuador's Indigenous movement has always been heterogeneous. In 1990, different local organisations decided when and how to protest, or even abstain. These groups also focused on local demands, such as stalled land claims and specific abuses by local officials (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009). CONAIE, however, as the largest national Indigenous organisation, released a set of sixteen demands, including: constitutional reform to publicly recognise Ecuador as a plurinational state, grants of lands and the legalisation of already occupied territories, the freezing of consumer prices, permanent funding for bilingual education, funding for Indigenous communities more broadly, and the fixing of fair prices for products (Pallares 2002, 228).²⁵ While the success of CONAIE in achieving these specific demands at the national level was limited, gains were made at the local level, often through the sale of land by private owners (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Pallares 2002).

Ecuador's Indigenous population had burst onto the national scene as an organised political movement in a way that few had expected. A political party, Pachakutik, was launched in 1996 to varying but sustained political success in national and local elections. The movement continued to hold a series of protests throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, even being involved in the toppling of President Mahuad in the year 2000, largely in response to dollarisation.

March 2006 marked another furious round of protests, this time against the US–Ecuador Free Trade Agreement and the Occidental Petroleum Corporation. When the protests came to an end, it at first appeared as if no gains had been made—the government was pressing ahead with the agreement

²⁵ There are several surviving versions of these demands, though the ones referred to here appear in nearly all of them. Other versions can be found at e-archivo ecuatoriano <<https://www.yachana.org/earchivo/>>.

and the petroleum corporation was still operating. However, in a sudden and unexpected turn of events, in May of that year the demands of the protesters were met—the government had cancelled the contract of the Occidental Petroleum Corporation and the free trade agreement negotiations had stalled, never to be resumed. There was a sense of victory among many Indigenous activists (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009).

At each stage, despite their heterogeneity, Indigenous Ecuadorians positioned themselves as opposed to the dominant neoliberal paradigm, structural adjustment, and capitalist globalisation more broadly. While some demands varied across time, a consistent theme was a rejection of the state's non-intervention in the market. Land was to be redistributed, prices fixed, and resources distributed to Indigenous communities. Indigenous Ecuadorian activists, amidst a much wider coalition of Indigenous movements across Latin America, were demanding recognition of substantive Indigenous rights (Puig 2010). In contrast, Latin American governments were promoting a form of “neoliberal multiculturalism” that allowed for Indigenous recognition but no substantive redistribution. Similarly, types of diversity recognised by this neoliberal multiculturalism were still very individualistic, with limited recognition of collective rights, such as those of communes, communities, and peoples and nationalities (*pueblos y nacionalidades*) (Postero 2007; Postero and Zamosc 2004; Radcliffe 2015).

The exact nature of the proposed relationship between Indigenous communities and the central government was complex and not entirely agreed upon. Indigenous communities both wanted a level of independence from the central government—including substantial decision-making powers and recognition of traditional justice systems—but also meaningful access to decision-making processes. In common across nearly all demands, however, was the implicit need for a strong, sovereign government to be able to redistribute wealth and shield communities from external

economic shocks. Protesters also expressed extreme doubts about trade partnerships, such as the US–Ecuador Free Trade Agreement, that the government was attempting to enter into.

This call for substantive Indigenous rights and redistribution came at a time when anti-neoliberal, anti-globalisation protests were occurring throughout the world. This was a “crisis of legitimacy” for neoliberalism globally, but particularly in Latin America (Gago 2017). In the region, these movements were particularly noted for having various Indigenous groups among the vanguard. The Zapatista movement in Mexico is a famous example (Esteva 2003),²⁶ but particularly relevant to the Ecuadorian context was a parallel process occurring in Bolivia. Similar to Ecuador, Indigenous organising had grown in scale through the 1970s and 1980s to erupt onto the national scene in the 1990s to demand cultural recognition and territorial rights. Despite some concessions by the government in the mid-nineties, protests continued, culminating in the “Gas War” of 2003, in which massive protests erupted in response to the export of natural gas. Bolivia’s first Indigenous president, Evo Morales, was elected in 2005. During this period, Indigenous protesters transformed the framing of their concerns. While they continued to make demands that cut against neoliberal policies of non-intervention in the market, their focus shifted from issues specifically facing Indigenous groups, to “objections on behalf of ‘the Bolivian people’” (Postero 2007, 4).

In Ecuador, Indigenous protesters reframed their demands along similar lines. Protests of the early 1990s focused on issues that primarily affected Indigenous communities—such as land rights,

²⁶ For an excellent, albeit slightly dated, analysis of the Zapatista movement, see Rus, Hernández Castillo, and Mattiace (2003)—the edited volume to which this citation belongs. The contributors to the volume offer an insightful series of analyses that emphasise the heterogeneity of the neoliberal resistance in Chiapas, emphasising that it stretched beyond a simplistic and yet eternal Mayan identity.

bilingual education, the definition of Ecuador as plurinational, and resources for communities. In the early 2000s, protesters' demands expanded to national macroeconomic issues, such as dollarisation and free trade agreements, that concerned the nation as a whole and the ability of poor Ecuadorians to sustain dignified livelihoods. While demands of the 1990s were certainly counter-neoliberal, in that they involved redistribution and required state intervention in order to be implemented as policies, it was these later demands that represented a shift to a thoroughly anti-neoliberal framework.

In this, Indigenous Ecuadorians were following a Latin American trend in which Indigenous movements began to take up anti-neoliberal concerns of entire nations and societies (Canessa 2006; Esteva 2003; Postero 2007; Zamosc 2004). By reframing their demands as issues on behalf of the marginalised of entire nations, Indigenous leaders and groups positioned themselves as opposed to capitalist modernity. Luis Macas (2005, 37), an Indigenous leader and twice president of CONAIE, wrote in 2005 that the Indigenous world could become “a fundamental element for historical change”. Some leaders, such as Bolivian Indigenous leader Gualberto Choque, even extended the idea of indigeneity to “one great way of thinking” that was anti-capitalist and open even to white and black Bolivians (Canessa 2006, 256). These are both examples of an inclusive form of indigeneity that has had success in forging alliances with non-Indigenous groups (Canessa 2006).²⁷

These conceptions of indigeneity are wider than direct rejections of neoliberalism as a macroeconomic doctrine. In framing Indigenous thought as one great way of thinking that was a

²⁷ Canessa contrasts this with a form of indigeneity that is exclusive and particularistic. This emphasises the difference and uniqueness of Indigenous peoples. This approach addresses political demands that either uniquely concern them or are common to larger populations but framed with regard to the specific needs of Indigenous groups. The discourse and political actions of Felipe Quispe offer an excellent example of this (Canessa 2006).

fundamental element for historical change, Indigenous leaders were rejecting neoliberalism not just as economic doctrine but as a political edifice.²⁸ At the same time, while this language might have been broader than economics, through its rejection of ideas of competition and the supremacy of the individual, it started to become the basis for a different way of performing the economy, discursively tied to hundreds of years of history.

Indigenous activists themselves rarely talked about their economic actions in relation to the PSE, especially as Indigenous groups began to experience more tensions with the government. Theorists of the PSE, framers of its legislation, and government functionaries tasked with its promotion, however, discursively linked the PSE to the politics of the time, effectively leaning on the perceived legitimacy of Indigenous politics, particularly in leftist circles. This linkage also represented an incorporation of the economic performances of Indigenous peoples, albeit essentialised ones (such as *minga*), into the PSE as an economic model. At the same time, as seen in the vice-president's speech, Indigenous protest itself was rarely mentioned. A similar process occurred with regard to the academic antecedents of the PSE. The language, itself deeply influenced by the same Indigenous movements, was often borrowed, but the more specific demands, such as radical wealth redistribution, were not.

Intellectual Influence

El Levantamiento of 1990 brought issues related to indigeneity to the forefront of Ecuadorian public consciousness, particularly as a movement opposed to neoliberalism. It also had a deep impact on

²⁸ Gago (2017) uses a distinction between “neoliberalism from above”—essentially a policy platform imposed by elites—and “neoliberalism from below”—a rationality that has been incorporated by those in the informal sector into their daily lives. Indigenous activism and the PSE are against the former in their discourse. In practice, aspects of neoliberal rationality have been incorporated into their actions.

many leftist intellectuals at the time (e.g., Albó 1991; Zamosc 1994). There had been cross-pollination between Indigenous and leftist political movements for decades in Ecuador, dating back to at least the 1920s, with both groups sharing methods of protest and intellectual labour (Becker 2008). However, the success of Indigenous political organising through the 1990s marked a deep shift in the political and intellectual landscape. Importantly, due to the mechanisms of the constitutional reform process, this shift was not contained to intellectual elites but spread widely through the population.

The first Indigenous uprising, the one most commonly referred to as ‘El Levantamiento’ occurred at a significant moment in history. As highlighted by Marc Becker (2008), an historian of both leftist politics and Indigenous organising in Ecuador, the Indigenous movement came to prominence at just the same time that the communist left in Ecuador was in disarray after the fall of the Berlin Wall. At a time when a pillar of leftist intellectual and political organising had fallen away, CONAIE was positioning “the Indian problem” as “a structural econo-political problem” (*problema económico-político estructural*) whose solution required the participation of “all of society” (CONAIE 1994, 4). This is why, for example, the 1994 declaration of its political project emphasises time and again that CONAIE is struggling for a better future for all sectors of Ecuadorian society. Therefore, as various Indigenous movements began a new phase in popular agitation, they were also stepping into a relative intellectual and political vacuum. This shift in dynamics not only affected the popular perceptions of the Indigenous political movement but the theoretical landscape as well, as leftist academics turned greater attention to the contributions of the movement to anti-capitalist thought.

There had been a long history of collaboration between Indigenous political groups and leftist organisations in Ecuador. The extent to which these relationships were collaborative or exploitative

has been greatly debated in academic circles, both inside and outside of Ecuador,²⁹ though by the 1990s, Indigenous groups themselves were regularly expressing their frustrations with leftist parties, seeing them as only paying Indigenous groups much heed when in need of votes. Certainly, *indigenas* were rarely allowed to form part of the leadership (Becker 2008). With the launch of Pachakutik in 1995, this relationship changed dramatically.

Formed through a coalition between CONAIE and several smaller leftist groups, Pachakutik's founders intended it to be more than a political party—they wanted it to be a broad-based social movement. This time, however, Indigenous groups were in the driving seat. The party itself was formed as a collaboration between CONAIE and other, smaller, leftist organisations, with the express purpose of being a third option between right-wing groups, who were perceived to have always been the enemy of Indigenous peoples, and left-wing groups, who failed to take Indigenous concerns sufficiently seriously (Becker 2008; Zamosc 2004). In Pachakutik, however, Indigenous groups and especially CONAIE were clearly the senior partners (Becker 2008; Lucero 2007).

The electoral successes of Pachakutik were small but significant, winning between 4–6 seats in Ecuador's legislative bodies in every election contested, including the Constituent Assembly that rewrote the constitution between 2007 and 2008. The party has also continued to have electoral success at the local level, although the rise of Alianza País appeared to somewhat split the voter base at the national level (Lalander, Lembke, and Ospina Peralta 2019). These ongoing victories, while small at the national level and somewhat contained to specific areas at the local level, still allowed Pachakutik and CONAIE to play an important role in shaping ongoing intellectual debate on the left. This appears

²⁹ For example, see: Becker (2008), Guerero (1993), and Ruiz Hernández and Burguete Cal y Mayor (2001).

to have been important, as in the most recent elections in 2021 the party enjoyed strong electoral success, with their presidential candidate only narrowly missing out on proceeding to the run-off election, Pachakutik becoming the second-largest party in the country, and a member of their party becoming president of the National Assembly.

The ongoing influence of Pachakutik is perhaps best embodied by Alberto Acosta, a key Ecuadorian figure in the formation of the PSE, who both wrote extensively on the topic and played an important role in ensuring the PSE was written into the constitution. Although not Indigenous himself, Acosta was one of the founders of Pachakutik and later ran as a presidential candidate for the party in 2013. In 2007 he was elected to the Constituent Assembly (on the ticket of Alianza País) that wrote the 2008 constitution, incorporating both the concepts of *sumak kawsay* (another term for Buen Vivir) and the PSE. He was elected president of the assembly, though he later resigned from that position due to tensions with the then president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa. These tensions eventually spilt over in later years, with Acosta denouncing Correa on several occasions. During the Constituent Assembly, he also served on Table 7, the group tasked with determining the future development model of Ecuador. In this position, he pushed for a concept of development that was broader than neoclassical ideas of economic growth, including concepts such as values of solidarity and reciprocity, as well as Buen Vivir and being in harmony with nature.

Acosta was not alone in his promotion of Indigenous concepts as alternatives to neoclassical economic development. While possibly the most famous example, other important figures followed similar trajectories. In their examination of the recent history of *sumak kawsay*, Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán (2015) identify both Pablo Dávalos, economist and columnist, and Augusto Barrera, politician and mayor of Quito, as particularly important in popularising Indigenous intellectual efforts

into wider academia. Similarly, Pablo Morales, from Pachakutik, was the president of Table 7 at the Constituent Assembly and pushed heavily to include the concept of *sumak kawsay* in the constitution.

The political goals of these individuals highlight how Indigenous anti-neoliberal conceptions of development came to occupy an important space in popular, academic, and political thinking at a crucial moment in Ecuadorian history—the writing of the 2008 constitution. The discourse of remaking the nation in order to help its citizens achieve *sumak kawsay* was not confined to an intellectual elite, however. The Constituent Assembly was the high-water mark of a diverse leftist coalition, opposed to neoliberalism broadly conceived.

The entire project had been a central campaign promise of Correa and his political movement, Alianza País. In the 2006 elections, Correa and his newly formed party had declined to run candidates for the National Congress as a way of voicing their objection to the entire edifice of Ecuador’s political institutions. Instead, a key plank in Correa’s platform had been that he would, by executive order, create a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. In 2007, over 80 per cent of the Ecuadorian electorate voted to approve the process, and in 2008, roughly two thirds approved this new constitution.

The relationship between Correa and the many social movements active at the time was a fraught one. Indigenous groups, in particular, struggled to both push for more substantive rights (such as the status of Kichwa as an official language and the right to veto mining in Indigenous territories) while not allowing the process to fall apart and play into the hands of their conservative opponents (Becker 2011). Nevertheless, by the end of the process, despite some reservations relating to the extent of their gains and the concentration of power in the executive (Becker 2011; Lupien 2011), important Indigenous groups encouraged their members to vote “yes” to the new constitution. The majorities

by which the process and the constitution itself were approved, however, were not the only reason the vice-president labelled the process as the most democratic in Ecuador's history.

During the drafting of the constitution, Indigenous groups kept pressure on the legislative body, with a near constant stream of representatives being received by the Constituent Assembly (Akchurin 2015; Lupien 2011). At the same time, the writing of the constitution was a national project in which the participants went to great lengths to involve the entire country in the conversation, with delegates travelling to hear opinions and discuss proposals with many around the country. Indigenous groups such as CONAIE held their own consultations, striving to keep their constituents informed, as well as garnering their views (Lupien 2011). The framing of the 2008 constitution was a truly national discussion, in which a great many Ecuadorians participated, beyond those in Montecristi. The structures of feeling around creating a new path for Ecuador away from its capitalist past were shared by many.

In CONAIE's proposals to the Constituent Assembly, the form of the national economy was clearly not a primary concern, with much more text dedicated to issues of land ownership and recognition of Indigenous rights. Nevertheless, where the economy as an entity was addressed in these submissions, the language clearly resonated with what would later become the legislation that defined the PSE. In one submission to the Assembly, CONAIE proposed the construction of an economic model that was "social, solidary, ecological, equitable, sovereign, planned and inclusive" (CONAIE 2007b, 6). In a proposed draft constitution submitted to the Assembly, CONAIE stated that "We propose a social, solidary and communitarian economic model, where ownership of land, communication media, natural resources, and the administration of financial resources all must be at the service of the wellbeing of the peoples [*los pueblos*] and not the economic profit [*rentabilidad economisista*] of the market" (CONAIE 2007a). In the same proposed constitution, the very first

objective of the economic system is declared to be “development that is socially equitable, regionally equilibrated, environmentally sustainable and democratically participatory” (CONAIE 2007a). This is not a perfect reflection of the language of the PSE, but it was an important precursor to the later legislation. In particular, it shares the same style of long non-hierarchical listing of values, referred to by Nelms (2015b) as “parataxis”.

That a national discussion should forge a new constitution filled with the language from Indigenous political thinking highlights the impact the movement had on the popular political discourse, both at the time and into the future, as articles in the constitution were turned into laws to be enacted as public policy. Even if the constitution carried few specific details of what the PSE actually was, it cemented the discursive framework that would provide its foundations. Furthermore, this discursive framework was widespread. The PSE has never engaged a majority of Ecuadorians nor even come close. Nevertheless, in sparking a widespread discussion on the future shape of the Ecuadorian polity, the 2008 constitutional process generated structures of feeling around opposition to the current capitalist system that were shared by many. Furthermore, through the central role played by Indigenous groups and their fraught relationship with the central government, the discourse surrounding the PSE, despite often being promulgated by the government, was also linked to a strong sense of mistrust toward the state.

Conclusion

By using language from the Organic Law of the PSE and constitution, as well as by making reference to the 2008 constitution as the most democratic in Ecuador’s history, the vice-president was tapping into structures of feeling associated with the anti-neoliberal movement of the 1990s and early 2000s—a powerful and passionate period in Ecuador’s recent history. Given her attempts to position herself

as a strong leftist candidate, rather than a centrist, and the largely left-wing audience to which she was speaking, Vicuña's indirect references to the feeling of being part of a resistance to dominant economic forms served as a legitimation of both her political credentials and the PSE. By discursively tying the present form of the PSE being promoted by her government back to the PSE's antecedents of anti-neoliberal protest, Vicuña was reinforcing the PSE's status as an alternative economy.

At the same time, neither the vice-president nor anyone else I spoke to in Ecuador ever explicitly mentioned the political mobilisations of the 1990s and 2000s in relation to the PSE. This divorced the PSE from the specific demands of those activists whose words and ideas went into the formation of that alternative economy. What was left was a pressing sense of being against the economic mainstream, often embodied in Big Business, but no other specific demands or political sociality to which to attach the PSE. This dynamic can be seen in the vignette with which I opened this chapter. Germán was very clear about how local development and the PSE were against big corporations and their way of doing business, about how their size made them exploitative, but he offered little advice as to what local development was. Additionally, as shown throughout this thesis, while PSE proponents were certainly supportive of government intervention in the marketplace, there was a near-universal sense that it could not be relied upon.

Consequently, despite the very different histories of modern entrepreneurialism and the PSE, there were resonances between the two. Both shared a feeling of being against the economic mainstream and were based in assumptions of an unreliable government, albeit unreliable for different reasons. That two disparate economic traditions share some foundational assumptions is, in some ways, a specific instance of Gershon's (2011) broader critique of earlier anthropological strategies of resistance to neoliberalism. She argues that the traditional anthropological tactic of showing how everything is a social construct is not particularly powerful in the face of neoliberalism. She makes the

point that neoliberalism is already an acknowledgement that markets are social constructs and is instead, at least in part, a prescriptive doctrine for a set of market-oriented social norms. The critique slides off because it has already been acknowledged.

The case of the PSE in Ecuador was in some ways similar. Being the intellectual construct of a diverse cohort committed to economic substantivism in one form or another, when the PSE is divorced from the specific demands that made the antecedent social movements explicitly anti-neoliberal (e.g., redistribution of land, end of privatisation, state control and protection of natural resources, radical wealth redistribution, etc.) what remains is a feeling that the current economic system needs to change but not what it needs to change to. Modern entrepreneurialism, with its discourse of disruption, rhetoric of opposition to powerful market incumbents, and scepticism of government intervention, while not the same, is similar and therefore makes for the easy cross-pollination of ideas.

The PSE was not simply entrepreneurialism. However, its status as fertile ground for many entrepreneurial logics lays the groundwork for the rest of my thesis. As precarity deeply affected everyone involved in the formation of the PSE, albeit in different ways, the pre-existing similarities between the PSE and modern entrepreneurialism only served to heighten the affective appeal of logics such as the importance of added value propositions, the need for innovation, the importance of seizing opportunities, etc. The constant churn in personnel certainly did the IEPS no favours in trying to keep the institute tethered to the memory of what the PSE was originally against. History did not make the PSE into entrepreneurialism in disguise, but it did lay the conditions for IEPS staff to encourage entrepreneurial strategies as they perceived their situation as becoming more precarious.

TWO

Precarity, Quality, and Temporality

In the basement of the Plataforma Norte—a government building in the inner north of Quito—the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS) was hosting a *rueda de negocios* (business round table). Designed to help promote the Popular Solidarity Economy (PSE), the event was effectively speed dating between a group of PSE producers and a group of hoteliers. The plan was that each hotelier would meet with the representatives from a producer, who would have five minutes to promote their wares before the hotelier moved on to the next table. A member of the IEPS with a loudspeaker kept time. The PSE producers were each stationed behind a table, forming a ring around the outside of the room. For the most part, the products on display were not typical for the PSE. The vast majority of PSE programs run by the IEPS focused on agricultural production, food services (particularly catering for preschools), and textiles (mostly primary-school uniforms). There were two textile associations present, producing bedding and towels, a few more offering agricultural products, and one offering catering. The rest were offering very different products. There was amaranth granola, pre-packaged frozen juices, macadamia oil, and even a stall selling soaps and moisturisers in little hotel-sized containers. These were expensive products for private consumption, rather than catering to government.

The official logic of the event was that in connecting PSE producers with potential large-scale private sector customers, the IEPS was helping create space in the market for PSE producers. ‘Space’

was a common word used by both IEPS staff and PSE actors, often as “we need to open a space in the market” or “we need space to sell [our products]”. While typically referring to a physical location (such as literally opening a marketplace), it could also be immaterial. The *rueda* was an example of this, where the space was not so much the physical government building, which was only temporarily being utilised, but the connections being made between PSE actors and potential customers. There were also attempts to create an online platform for PSE actors to sell their products, although this met with extremely limited success. The underlying assumption behind the emphasis on creating space was that PSE actors were already producing the right kinds of products and there were ready customers out there with money, they just needed to be connected. Wider issues, such as whether a market existed for a product or whether the market was oversaturated, for example, were largely unaddressed. At the *rueda*, the idea was that by connecting PSE actors to hoteliers, an opportunity might be created to sell to hotels. If this worked, IEPS staff hoped that because hotels were businesses, rather than individual consumers, this might generate larger and more ongoing sales for PSE producers.

A second, possibly even more important aspect of the event was putting the PSE on show for a wider audience. PSE events tended to attract similar crowds of IEPS and NGO staff, left-wing academics, and beneficiaries of relevant government programs. Many working in the space felt the need to try and make the PSE visible to a wider Ecuadorian public, often phrased as *visibilización*. When I talked to Gabriela, one of the Zone 9 (Pichincha) staff, she described the purpose of the event as to show that the PSE didn't have bad quality products. This was reflected heavily in the format of the event. Almost any day I visited a PSE association or an IEPS workshop, people generally wore casual clothes of various description. At the *rueda*, most PSE producers were dressed in polo shirts with the logo of their association embroidered on the breast. It was almost a uniform. A few of the producers,

particularly those whose wares were less common (such as the single-serve frozen juices), were dressed even more formally, with button-down shirts and even one person in a suit jacket.

Adding to the sense of exhibiting the PSE, almost every producer had a vinyl sign behind them with the name of their association and images of their products. The group selling juices had a chipboard sign with black vinyl on the front, into which their logo had been electronically routed. A lot of people commented on it, impressed by its sleek design and how it stood out from the other signage. One of the associations who specialised in towels and bedding had made little beds, as if for dolls, kitted out with pillows and sheets with their logo on. These were particularly popular among both attendees and IEPS staff themselves.

The *rueda* was an event clearly designed to put on a show and demonstrate the PSE was more than just the informal economy, which was how many advocates feared that the rest of Ecuador perceived the PSE (if they knew what it was at all). In his opening speech, the director of the local IEPS team said that we, meaning everyone present, were leaving behind the idea that the PSE was a small economy for poor people. He continued to say that the event was organised so that those present could better see the products the PSE supplied. This was spoken with a passionate tone that implied the excellent quality on display. Between the speech, the attire, the signage, and even the products chosen by the IEPS to be present, *rueda* was clearly an event to show what organisers hoped the PSE could be.³⁰

This aspirational tone, however, was troubled by one of the most frequented stands at the *rueda*. Sitting off to the side of one of the agricultural associations was an older woman selling cake.

³⁰ See also: Hirsch (2022) for a more in-depth examination of similar events in Peru that were staged to demonstrate the wealth and quality of a particular local sector of the economy.

She was a member of the association, but did not engage in the negotiations, leaving them to younger members. She had set herself up on the corner of her group's table, facing away from the rest of the association, with her cakes next to her and a sign saying they were a dollar a slice. There were three: *mortiño* (Andean blueberry), *camote* (sweet potato), and carrot. At first, she did not seem to sell a lot. As the day continued, however, the speed-dating aspect broke down and all present—hoteliers, PSE producers, passers-by, and even IEPS staff themselves—tended to simply wander the stalls and talk about what was unusual or particularly good quality, or just generally interesting. Friends of stallholders also showed up to offer moral support. As this occurred, cake sales went up. The woman's stall was one of the most commented on by IEPS staff, and everyone said the cake was *muy rico* (delicious). One of the IEPS staff, Catarina, after talking about how good the cake was, said to me that the lady was not actually supposed to be selling anything at the event. She said that the *rueda* was intended to be solely for the display of wares and to share contact details, not make actual sales. There was no sense of accusation in Catarina's tone, however. She followed up by noting that “you have to take advantage of opportunities” (*tienes que aprovechar las oportunidades*), which appeared to serve as a justification for the lack of enforcement from the IEPS.

Catarina's ambivalence toward the cake seller—in that she both acknowledged the seller was breaking the rules but also thought she was right to be there—highlights the wider tensions among differing logics surrounding the construction of the PSE as a formally recognised economy in Ecuador. Academic literature on the PSE and alternative economies more broadly identifies it as a form of popular economy. Key theorists of the PSE argue that its foundations lie in the everyday practices of the wider population—often implicitly working, lower-class, and campesino populations (Acosta 2011; Chaves 1997; Coraggio 2011; Razeto M 2015). At the same time, the IEPS and other proponents were constantly advocating that the PSE was “not just a poor economy for poor people” (*no es una economía*

pobre para pobres). The *rueda* was explicitly an event to highlight the quality of PSE products. The woman's cake, potentially along with herself, blurred the line between these two imperatives. In doing so, it highlighted a set of dilemmas faced by the IEPS in attempting to promote entrepreneurial forms of economy, while also attempting to regulate it in such a way that it was distinct from the broader popular or informal economy—both in the types of products for sale and the economic strategies pursued. Catarina's justification for the cake seller's ongoing presence—that you have to *aprovechar las oportunidades*—spoke to how, in a wider context of neoliberal precarity, opportunism served to render the disparate logics into a workable whole.

In this chapter, I examine how the felt need to constantly seize opportunities was both a result of the surrounding precarity but also a cause of further precarity. That is, *aprovechar las oportunidades* was effectively precarity painted in a positive light. To do this, I first review the anthropological literature on precarity, using the example of an association that supplied IT services to the government to show how the many different forms of precarity experienced by IEPS staff and PSE actors were interrelated in both cause and effect. I then return to the cake seller at the *rueda* to examine the boundaries her presence troubled for IEPS staff and how *aprovechar las oportunidades* was used to justify her ongoing attendance. Finally, I show how IEPS staff were intimately familiar with the need to seize opportunities through their own work and how the constant pressure to *aprovechar las oportunidades* created particular temporalities that focused on both the extreme short and long term. Seizing opportunities was both a result of a context in which plans could not be made beyond the short term and also a contributor to that exact dynamic.

Precarity

That Catarina justified the cake seller's presence through the need to *aprovechar las oportunidades* reflected how my interlocutors, from the IEPS and many other organisations, frequently spoke about opportunities and the importance of taking advantage of them. It was commonly expressed in the word *aprovechar* or sometimes *aprovecharse (de algo)*. These words are commonly translated into English as 'to take advantage (of something)'. Like in English, this can have negative connotations, especially if you are taking advantage of a person and occasionally if you are taking advantage of some things, such as non-renewable resources. During my time in Ecuador, however, *aprovechar* and discussions of opportunities were almost always used in a positive sense. This ranged from slightly resigned (in the sense of "you just have to make the best of it") to being quite excited that you had seized a clever opportunity. It also, at times, carried a sense of moral obligation—we all ought to be seizing opportunities, and those who failed to were at least partially responsible for their misfortune.

Using *aprovechar las oportunidades* to justify the cake seller's presence only made sense in a context of assumed precarity. Seizing an opportunity is only important if you cannot be sure there will be another. Catarina and other staff were deeply familiar with the constant need to seize opportunities as it informed their own labour, both in their work in the IEPS and how they pieced together livelihoods more broadly. As discussed throughout this thesis, due to the surrounding political and economic context, the lives of IEPS staff and others involved in PSE promotion were constantly underscored by different forms of precarity. These were experienced differently but were mutually reinforcing. In this section, I examine the anthropological literature on precarity, both regarding the informal economy in which the cake seller was ensconced and the aspirational middle-class lifestyles IEPS staff were leading. Through the example of FamíTech—an association specialised in supplying IT equipment to

government—I examine how the precarity experienced by IEPS staff and program beneficiaries was intertwined, both in its causes and effects.

The poor and disenfranchised having to cobble together diverse economic practices in order to sustain livelihoods is not new. Nevertheless, anthropologists working in Latin America have documented how, under modern neoliberal capitalism, many in the informal sector have had to increasingly engage in diverse income-generating strategies that are themselves further embedded in international patterns of finance (Ellison 2018; Falconer 2018; Schuster 2015). Many have noted the dilemma that the financial instruments designed to support these groups often both rely on the feminised nature of these livelihood strategies (typically framed as household reproduction) and the supposed flexibility of women. These initiatives therefore often lock women into precarious livelihood strategies and thus reinforce the feminised nature of said strategies. Falconer (2018), when examining the roll-out of a conditional cash transfer scheme in Ecuador, highlights how mothers “make-do” through diverse monetary and non-monetary economic practices as they arise—a similar idea to having to *aprovechar las oportunidades*. This “making do”, however, actually rendered the women ineligible for the very supports that were supposed to reduce the need for these economic strategies. Even when support can be accessed, such programs often become another thread in the patchwork of precarity they are designed to address.

The need for the IEPS to “make-do” through its own diverse set of opportunistic practices is not a direct correlation to the livelihood practices of project beneficiaries. Both, however, were reflective of the wider precarious economic situation in which all groups found themselves. During my time in Ecuador, the IEPS underwent a massive change in personnel. This impermanence had a ripple effect. As the IEPS were unable to run long-term programs, they attempted to run a wide variety of short-term, unstable, and insecure projects. PSE actors who relied on IEPS projects often already

utilised a diverse set of income strategies. In response to these insecure projects, rather than reduce the number of income streams or participate in strategies with longer time horizons, beneficiaries had to further change and diversify their practices. Beneficiaries definitely appreciated IEPS support if and when they received it; however, in most cases, rather than providing security upon which medium-term livelihood strategies could be planned, IEPS programs often became another short-term practice with the distant hope of becoming a stable venture.

FamiTech was perhaps the best example of how the precarity experienced by IEPS staff was interwoven with that of PSE actors. Only having recently formed, FamiTech was possibly the only registered PSE association providing IT services in Ecuador, specialising in supplying government institutions. Valeria, a member of the IEPS Zone 9 team, and I were heading out to visit the association in order to follow up on a project run in conjunction with a local university. Valeria was conducting the follow up because Diego, whose project it originally was, had recently been let go from the IEPS. She knew little of the association and had never met its members. We mostly spoke to Hugo, the founder and president of the association, asking about how the project was going.

Valeria asked about the formation of FamiTech. It turned out that Diego, who had only joined the IEPS earlier that year, had originally helped them form. During the conversation, Hugo mentioned the names of two more local IEPS staff who he had talked to. Valeria said they had both moved on. He looked a little surprised and listed a few more names of people he had spoken to. Only three of them were still around.

He also said he had met Germán, the head of the local team. “Is he still the director?”.

“He is. Or was,” responded Valeria with a slightly cynical chuckle. She did not explain to Hugo, but Germán had been replaced literally the day before.

Later, following up with Hugo to get more of the history of FamiTech, our discussion revealed that the association was part of the diversification of economic practices his family were undertaking as a response to earlier economic instability. Hugo had previously worked in IT, in what he described as a good job that paid well and let him provide for his family—something relatively uncommon in Ecuador, even for the urban middle class. FamiTech was one strategy Hugo’s family implemented in response to his losing his job.

Many anthropologists have shown how, outside of a subset of the white male population of developed Western nations in the 20th Century, the stability of the welfare state was not something to which most people could realistically aspire (Betti 2016; Millar 2017; Munck 2013; Thorkelson 2016). To return to the *rueda* for a moment, an old woman developing an income stream for her family by selling cake whenever an opportunity arose was nothing unusual in and of itself.

In addressing how security has been the expected norm for limited populations, both Millar (2018) and Thorkelson (2016) have argued that the concept of ‘precarity’ can actually be quite conservative. Millar’s study of waste pickers in Brazil is particularly elucidating. In showing how many waste pickers return to the rubbish tip, despite receiving better paid and more secure work, she demonstrates how many pickers experience the source of their precarity as much through their social connections as through their economic circumstances. That is, they often return to the tip because the regular hours and requirements of formal work do not fit the myriad of other social connections that underpin their lives.³¹ Many PSE beneficiaries, while perhaps not as precarious as those Brazilian waste pickers, certainly encountered similar dilemmas. The struggle to get regular attendance at PSE

³¹ See also: Penny Harvey (2018) for a similar analysis of family connections being experienced as the source of precarity, though in the Peruvian context, she focuses upon various forms of collective labour.

workshops organised by the IEPS reflected that most PSE beneficiaries had a host of other commitments that often took priority.

Although Hugo and his family were clearly of a different class status than most street sellers, there were commonalities between their experiences. The most obvious was that for all but the most successful PSE associations, individuals, households, and even extended families had to piece together livelihoods from a wide variety of strategies. FamiTech, for instance, was only one thread of a wider network of economic practices. Erika, Hugo's wife, had formed her own catering association, with support from another government department rather than the IEPS. Erika also provided cooking courses, sometimes privately out of their home or often as workshops organised by local governments. The overlap in membership between the two associations was almost identical, with only a few different members. Family helped at both whenever needed. One of Hugo's cousins, for instance, was an Uber driver who helped at either association as required.

While talking to them about their associations, I joked that they mustn't have any free time. Hugo and Erika laughed and replied that you do what you can to make some money—another statement reminiscent of Catarina's "tienes que aprovechar las oportunidades". With the IEPS and wider government unable to guarantee any form of economic security for these associations, they became two threads in a wider patchwork of precarious economic practices. In this regard, Hugo's family provides an excellent example of precarity as a condition of labour, following in the tradition of Bourdieu (1998).³²

³² See also: Castel (2003), Kalleberg (2011), and Vosko (2009).

In her review of the anthropological literature on precarity, Millar (2017) highlights that in addition to being a condition of labour, anthropologists following Butler (2004) have also considered precarity as an ontological experience (e.g., Ettlinger 2007; Hundle 2012; Tsing 2015). From this perspective, “Precarity is a state of acknowledgement of our vulnerability to others” (Tsing 2015, 29)—both human and non-human. Importantly, in taking an ontological approach, such scholars emphasise how precarity can fundamentally reshape one’s experience of the world. In the case of both Hugo’s family and IEPS staff, both experienced threats to their class status. In large part, their precarious experiences of middle-class status were shared because they had a common root cause. Hugo had lost his job in 2014 during “the crisis”—referring to the 2014 crash in the price of oil. This was the same crisis that had led the government to slash its budgets and created massive difficulties for the IEPS. The creation of FamiTech in 2017 and the delicate position of the IEPS were interrelated and so, too, was the precarity of the class status of all concerned.

Although job security has only been a general expectation for limited populations in specific time periods, Muehlebach and Shoshan (2012) and Kate Weston (2017) have highlighted the affective pull of Fordism and the promise of secure full-time employment, even in places where they were only partially realised. Even if Hugo was one of a relatively lucky minority to have previously held a “good job”, the ideal of secure, ongoing work still has a strong appeal in countries like Ecuador, especially among middle-class urban populations, like those in Quito. At the same time, works on emerging Latin American middle classes highlight how they are both poorer and their wealth less secure than previous understandings of the middle class in Latin America (Castellani and Parent 2011; Dayton-Johnson 2015; Ferreira et al. 2013; Franco, Hopenhayn, and León 2011; Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012). With more markers of class status coming from consumption, often on credit (Han 2012) rather than ownership of enduring goods, middle-class status is easy to lose.

Despite these perils to class status, without other options, the response of Hugo and his family was to engage in microentrepreneurial enterprises—risky ventures. In December of 2017, Hugo gathered nine of his family members to form an association supplying IT equipment. After some success in gaining local government contracts, the association was having some difficulties finding more customers. The conflicted relationship to precarity and class was reflected in Hugo's thoughts about his association. He was proud of the association. He thought the idea of the PSE was good and very much preferred working at FamiTech to his old job. Hugo had earned much more previously but had no time for his family. Now, according to Hugo, he was working with his family, could choose his own schedule, and generally had a better work-life balance. His only hesitation was whether the association would be viable over the long term.

He had been the impetus behind forming FamiTech, based on the idea that they could supply local government. They had gained some work, but further contracts were proving difficult. Without an explicit program from the government for IT services, the bureaucratic procedures for gaining procurement contracts were especially challenging. Although they were getting a small amount of work from the private market, Hugo said that the future of FamiTech was essentially predicated on the government making it easier for PSE organisations to supply IT services. He needed the government to provide some sort of medium to long-term stability.

Concerns about the ongoing support of the government were a constant background tension for almost everyone I spoke to—bureaucrats, NGO staff, and PSE actors. They were all concerned that Ecuadorian politics might shift further to the right and that the favourable procurement programs that were the backbone of the PSE might end. These fears persisted, even though the bulk of PSE public procurement came from two categories of government procurement that nobody was talking

about eliminating—primary school uniforms and preschool catering. The lack of certainty in government support reinforced the need to operate in the private economy.

At the same time, the private market presented its own dangers for the IEPS, as the move to selling directly to consumers often intersected with informal economic practices that proponents wanted to distance the PSE from. In the next section, I return to the cake seller at the *rueda*, discussing how she troubled important boundaries for IEPS staff between informal economy and quality products. *Aprovechar las oportunidades* worked to ease these troubles. At the same time, the logic of seizing opportunities also made for heightened precarity for all concerned.

Calidad

Returning to the *rueda*, in many ways the set-up of the cake seller was familiar. She was an older woman dressed in a skirt, blouse, and shawl, which was very distinct against the monogrammed polo shirts and business suits around her. She had come to the event and set herself up to sell her product without asking permission of anyone present. In markets, central squares, and even just wandering around the historic centre of Quito, the sight of women selling food produced at home from spots perched in parks or by the side of the road is entirely commonplace, as is the sight of their being moved on by police. This was an association with the informal economy that organisers wished to avoid.

At the same time, the cake seller absolutely embodied the sort of economy the IEPS wished to display. Firstly, her cake was delicious. IEPS staff were deeply concerned with the *calidad* (quality) of PSE products, and the cake was certainly of the quality the IEPS were hoping for. Furthermore, both her appearance and the ingredients in the cake hinted at a form of ‘tradition’ favoured by many PSE proponents. Both spoke to roots in ‘ancestral practices’—a term often used to refer to an idealised

pre-Columbian past—but also fit a modern left-wing aesthetic. In this section, I examine how the cake seller blurred the boundaries between the informal economy the IEPS wished to avoid and the quality economy they wished to promote.

Informal trading, particularly street selling, is an especially feminised and policed practice throughout Latin America. In accordance with a wider anthropological literature on female livelihoods and informality throughout the continent, female traders and microentrepreneurs more broadly are often socially constructed in roles that both reinforce and trouble their femininity (Ellison 2018; Falconer 2018; Han 2012; Schuster 2015; Weismantel 2001).

While now more than twenty years old, Weismantel's (2001) study of Andean market women, gender, and race is instructive. In it, she examines the intersection of white and Indian, male and female, and the contradictions these interactions throw up. Importantly, she notes the ambiguous place of "cholas" (a vernacular, often derogatory, term for racially marked market women). These are traders who move back and forth between towns and cities to trade, often dealing in agricultural products. As people who cross boundaries, they trouble neat definitions. They are city people when in the country and country people when in the city, Indigenous to the white gaze and white to the Indigenous gaze. With reference to Douglas's (2002 [1966]) classic *Purity and Danger*, Weismantel argues that this crossing of boundaries makes the cholas dangerous to both those from the city and the countryside—they are perpetually out of place. The reaction of IEPS staff to informal traders was never as extreme as some situations described by Weismantel; however, the attempts to keep informal sellers out of PSE events highlighted their perceived danger.

This danger was not just felt by the IEPS. Informal traders in Ecuador, as in many countries, are also highly policed. Informal selling is recognised in the constitution under the right to work. However, in practice, informal sellers, especially *vendedores ambulantes* (street sellers), are still highly

policed due to the gamut of processes and procedures needed to gain a permit. The police are also theoretically not allowed to seize wares, although there are many reports of this occurring in practice. Even when goods are not seized, several contacts reported police destroying their wares. Several women selling milk at a marketplace in Loja without paying for a space, for instance, reported police kicking over their pails.

More broadly, Dávila (2016) highlights that even when not being literally policed, lower classes can be segregated from middle to upper-class spaces through seemingly innocuous design choices, whether that be in architecture, marketing, event planning, or simply the products for sale. Like the Colombian shopping centres studied by Dávila, holding the *rueda* in a sleek, modern building in the expensive inner north of Quito and ensuring the products matched what the middle-class IEPS staff perceived as quality ran the strong possibility of segregating the PSE as a middle-class project. While the cake seller was allowed to remain at the *rueda*, her continued attendance was not assured. Catarina's comment that she was not technically supposed to be selling cake attested to the seller's uncertain position at the event and served as a reminder that class boundaries could be enforced at any time.

The cake seller and her products troubled these boundaries and highlighted the PSE's precarious status as an alternative to mainstream economic forms—in her case, particularly the informal economy. She sat comfortably and confidently in a space of business negotiation. Male and female representation was reasonably equitable among all groups—hoteliers, PSE producers, and even IEPS staff—so the *rueda* was not inherently a masculine space. Nevertheless, as per Weismantel's (2001) observations of markets throughout the Andes, while selling to consumers in a market is a highly feminised labour, selling wholesale—often a labour that is more profitable and less precarious—is substantially more masculine. This separation between the consumer and wholesale markets, as well as how it is gendered, ties into a broader set of contradictions within the PSE. Proponents style the

PSE as a response to capitalism, particularly the exclusion of masses of the population from secure wage labour and, in the words of many of my interlocutors, “a dignified life” (*una vida digna*—often implicitly associated with a singular, stable income). On the other hand, in practice, the work of groups like the IEPS relies on the precarious and informal labour that are supposedly one of the outcomes of neoliberal capitalism.

To be certain, groups and especially government organisations like the IEPS sought to formalise this work. IEPS staff expended a lot of effort encouraging producers to register as part of the PSE. As per many development projects globally, a large part of the promise of the PSE as government policy was the formalisation of previously unregistered practices. This formalisation clearly provided benefits to associations and their members, such as minimum working conditions, access to many social security benefits, and the possibility to sell to the government. Employees could potentially also have the right to become members of an association or cooperative if their employment was sustained.

At the same time, returning to the topic of policing informality, Bernards (2017, 1832) highlights how the concept of the informal economy has historically been used by various dominant groups to depoliticise poverty and serve as a disciplinary function in “struggles over class and political authority”. Given the strong association between the informal economy and lower-class status (Dávila 2016), while the formalisation of PSE enterprises provided real benefits for all concerned, it also played into the concerns of middle-class proponents with the quality of PSE goods and services.

Regardless of the organisational forms encouraged by the IEPS, during my time in Ecuador, endeavours promoted by functionaries still emphasised small-scale production to the private home-consumption market. Such enterprises often lacked clear, continuing outlets for products and had little guarantee of an ongoing customer base. Many PSE organisations that were technically registered

therefore often still strongly resembled informal businesses. This was a situation the *rueda* was designed to ameliorate by hopefully connecting suppliers to larger-scale and longer-term customers. If part of the purpose of the *rueda* was to move away from informal, uncertain commerce and show that the PSE contained products *de calidad* (good quality), the figure of an older woman informally selling cake at first appeared to be a juxtaposition.

In other ways, the woman and her cake absolutely belonged at the event. Apart from the opportunism that Catarina noted as necessary, the cake seller also embodied an aspirational version of the PSE that was very much on display at the *rueda*. Everyone agreed her cake was *muy rico* (delicious). If the *rueda* was, in part, to show that the PSE could produce quality goods, everyone appeared to agree the cake was certainly that. When Gabriela talked about showing that PSE products were not bad quality, she was speaking to a larger and commonly referenced concern of IEPS staff—that either most PSE producers did not make good quality products, or that they did, but this was not recognised.

What exactly constituted *calidad* was never precisely defined. Instead, common reference points were the appearance of a product or its packaging; the taste of a foodstuff, especially if it was novel or different; the durability of textiles; perceived links to ancestral practices; and the perceived health and environmental impact of a product, generally referenced in whether it was organic or agroecological. More broadly, references to whether PSE products were *de calidad* fit into broader historical discussions of race, class, and reputation throughout the Andes, with *calidad* generally being associated with whiteness, honour, and modernity all very broadly conceived (Andrews 2016; Delgadillo Núñez 2019; McCaa 1984; Rappaport 2014). Talks and discussions about PSE products displaying a lack of *calidad* evinced anxieties around the place or role of the PSE in contemporary Ecuador as well as the mix of logics that the PSE entailed and that came together to mark something as *de calidad* or not.

That the cake itself clearly demonstrated *calidad* was key to the seller being allowed to stay. Simply associating the cake with whiteness would be misleading, given clear associations between the cake, its seller, and ideas of tradition. At the same time, the ingredients and form of the cake, as well as the seller's practices, alluded to a wider set of intertwined economic logics that the IEPS and others operated across in order to forge the PSE as a coherent whole.

One of the key reasons the cake was perceived as *de calidad* was its novelty. It was unusual. During my time in Ecuador, the most common cakes for sale were elaborately iced sponges, sometimes with fruit on top. Some cakes were less elaborately decorated, especially those sold on the street. In comparison, the cake at the *rueda* was dense, moist, and un-iced. The ingredients of the cakes themselves resonated with discursive framings of the PSE, as well as being 'novel' in a way that well-suited the entrepreneurial vibe of the *rueda*. While 'mortiño' is sometimes translated simply as 'blueberry', it is actually a different species of berry native to mountainous regions throughout Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. People throughout my fieldwork associated it strongly with the Andes and *prácticas ancestrales* more generally. Products made with *mortiño*, such as wine and jams, were going through a revival during my time in Ecuador, particularly among middle-class, left-wing circles. At the same time, I never encountered another *mortiño* cake during my fieldwork. Similarly, while carrot cake was not unheard of in Ecuador, it was something I encountered far less frequently in my fieldwork than iced sponge cakes. When I did encounter carrot cake, it was generally in trendy cafés that catered to upper-middle-class clientele. In fact, the combination of a traditional, home-cooked aesthetic combined with the novelty of an unusual set of ingredients (that themselves also signified connections to 'tradition') meant the cakes would not have been out of place in a number of the more recent cafés that have sprouted around the inner north of Quito with an almost 'hipster' vibe. While, in the context of the *rueda* and the PSE more broadly, references to *calidad* clearly did not simply

mean ‘white’, they broadly indexed a set of sensibilities that related to an inner-city, upper-middle-class lifestyle.

The woman’s practice of selling also cut between the logics of the formal and informal economy. While tourists to Ecuador might imagine markets as a riot of sound and colour, most of those frequented by locals, especially food markets, are not so boisterous. Certainly, with a lot of people can come a lot of noise but, at least around Quito, actively calling out to passers-by and touting your wares was less common outside of tourist markets. The woman’s practice of simply sitting quietly and letting her cakes sell themselves was therefore not unusual. At most markets, however, prices were almost never advertised with signage, with the buyer instead having to enquire. Putting up a small sign, albeit hand-written on cardboard, was itself unusual, lending a sense of formality that official market stall holders often lack.

Talking to Catarina later, she revealed that the woman was actually a regular at an organic market to the north of Quito. In Ecuador, agroecology and organic food were associated with the PSE by proponents.³³ The perceived benefits for one’s health and the environment were both viewed as valuing the *ser humano* and *pachamama* ahead of the market and the individual.³⁴ More broadly, while

³³ Since leaving Ecuador, it seems the country has followed the lead of other South American nations with the term “organic” often being used as a signifier of expensive, upper-class chemical-free agriculture (often talked about as an imposition of the Global North), while agroecology is used to refer to local practices of chemical-free agriculture, often incorporating techniques perceived to be *prácticas ancestrales* (ancestral practices). At the time of my fieldwork, most of my interlocutors used the two terms interchangeably.

³⁴ As mentioned in the previous chapter, *ser humano* (literally, ‘human being’) was used to refer to the person in a holistic sense, rather than an anthropocentric one. *Pachamama* is often translated into English as ‘Mother Earth’, although throughout the Andes, it has other local and Indigenous significance.

certified organic food was certainly associated with wealth, during my time in Quito there was a clamouring for food that was chemical-free from many more groups, including lower-middle classes.

The creation and expansion of the cooperative Sur Siendo Redes y Sabores, exemplifies this growing demand. The cooperative was founded to make agroecological produce available in the south of Quito, with the express aim of trying to avoid agroecological produce being something that only the wealthy could afford. At the same time, while moving out of the realm of the purely upper class, agroecology and organic food were still set apart from popular markets frequented by the bulk of non-upper-class Quiteños. As I argue in the next chapter, agroecological products represent an aspirational form of consumption for a left-wing subset of the emerging middle classes in Ecuador—a way to assert class status. The cakes on sale at the *rueda* were different from the usual wares for sale at other informal or semi-formal market spaces. Through their taste, their aesthetic, and their agroecological content, they spoke to differing perceptions of *calidad*.

The cake and its seller represented a dilemma for IEPS staff at the *rueda*. Despite not officially belonging in the room, they very much suited the event, both the aspirational side of what the PSE could be and what it was in practice. However, this dual belonging also created tensions, as it troubled the distinctions between different economic logics that the IEPS had to operate across. The cake seller and her product represented an intersection of contemporary entrepreneurial tastes and logics as well as images of more popular and informal economies that the IEPS were attempting to distance themselves from. Furthermore, by informally belonging to the space but formally not belonging (in that neither she nor her cakes seemed out of place despite being technically against the rules), they troubled the bureaucratic logics that defined the IEPS as a government organisation.

Catarina's words (that you have to *aprovechar las oportunidades*) worked to smooth over the dilemma of the cake seller's presence. By selling her cakes at the *rueda*, she was practicing something

that was dangerously similar to informal economy. This risk was justified through her seizing an opportunity. It was both sound business and a moral imperative. The need to seize opportunities was something with which IEPS staff themselves were deeply familiar. As detailed in the next section, almost all of the IEPS's work consisted of attempts to quickly seize opportunities as they arose. *Aprovechar las oportunidades* thus created a particular temporality that was self-reinforcing. As the pressure rose to constantly seek out opportunities in the short term, there was a lack of stability to make plans beyond that time frame. At the same time, the PSE was a sort of utopian vision that fixed the attention of both IEPS staff and beneficiaries on the extreme long term. Following Guyer (2007), I argue this created a hollowing out of medium-term time horizons.

Short-Term Time Horizons

Here I argue that this need to *aprovechar las oportunidades* was a result of the wider context of neoliberal precarity in which both IEPS staff and PSE actors found themselves. This precarity was experienced in different ways; however, due to this instability, both groups had to resort to diverse, opportunistic strategies to piece together livelihoods. In the case of the IEPS, they were piecing together public policy in order to be successful government functionaries, and, in the case of PSE actors, they were piecing together livelihood strategies. This need to seize opportunities lent itself to plans with short-term time horizons. Similar to the observations of Guyer (2007) and others,³⁵ I observed an “evacuation” of the near future. Without certainty about where future funding was coming from—either funding for programs or future customers—both the IEPS and PSE actors were forced to keep plans to the short term. They generally ran brief projects or, if something were designed as an ongoing

³⁵ See also: Jansen (2014), Streinzer (2016), and Swartz (2018).

program, they designed it to be iterative so that it could still cease at short notice. People's attention was primarily focused on either the extremely short term or on an almost utopian long term, in which enough Ecuadorians had changed their mentalities to make the PSE truly possible. *Aprovechar las oportunidades* was both a response to instability and a cause of it.

One experience of instability for many IEPS staff was related to a shift in the programs being implemented. While one-off workshops and short-term projects had always been a part of the IEPS repertoire, 2018 (the year of my fieldwork) in some ways marked the end of an era. No project nor program started by the IEPS while I was there ran for longer than a few months, with many being much shorter than that. IEPS staff still held out the hope for funding from an international organisation that could guarantee resources for multiple years, but this appeared rare.³⁶

The last long-term program in Zone 9 was nearing completion while I was there. This program was based around the purchase of machinery to renovate a cheese-making association. The IEPS had paid 80 per cent of the cost of a set of new machinery for an extant cooperative, under the condition that they would pay the remaining 20 per cent. This was supposed to be paid back over 24 instalments, starting from the fourth year. They failed to make these payments. The IEPS attempted to organise

³⁶ One large project to support rural livelihoods had received funding from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). It was organised across several provinces, none of which I spent time in. However, the formal agreement to begin the program was signed in 2017 and the first round of funding was not disbursed until 2019. The most recent report from the IFAD notes that minimal actions have been undertaken, for many contextual reasons including a massive turnover in personnel, changes in economic circumstances since the crash in the price of oil, political changes, etc. Even projects with the long-term funding that the IEPS desired were often derailed due to circumstances of economic and political instability.

support for the association. Catarina, for instance, was put in charge of an attempt to organise an internship program for the association with students from a local university, coordinating with an NGO. The hope was that this could improve the performance of the cooperative so that they could make their repayments. If they did not, the IEPS would repossess the machinery.

“They had four years to get ahead,” Catarina explained. “But now they need to pay their part. If they don’t, the IEPS will reclaim the machines and give them to someone who is going to take advantage of the opportunity.” Implicit in her statement was the fact that the reason the cooperative was unable or unwilling to make their co-payment was because they had not properly taken advantage of the opportunity they had been presented with.

Catarina’s efforts proved to no avail and the IEPS later decided to reclaim much of the machinery. Talking later to Sebastian, another member of the local IEPS team that ended up in charge of organising this repossession, he acknowledged that the association had faults, specifically that the administration had made some poor financial decisions; however, he continued to note that the IEPS also bore a lot of the blame for their lack of *seguimiento*. While often translated as “monitoring” or “monitoring and evaluation”, with the IEPS, *seguimiento* was a very active form of follow-up in which staff attempted to resolve problems as they arose. This often involved liaising between various stakeholders, particularly helping PSE actors follow the procedures of other government departments or, at times, simply understand them.³⁷ Sebastian noted, however, that the IEPS, particularly Zone 9, lacked resources, especially transport and personnel. This meant that the local team simply could not send staff regularly to the project to follow up.

³⁷ I later describe this as the work of ‘articulation’, discussed more in chapters four and five.

With a sense of bitterness, he noted that this was the only project that had received financing from the IEPS in Pichincha since 2013. At the time of our conversation, Sebastian had only recently joined the local IEPS team. He had, however, worked at the national level of the IEPS for a couple of years before moving to another government ministry for a bit over a year and then returning to the IEPS. He said that even in his year away, the IEPS had changed. They used to do projects, but now it had all stopped.

The other key ongoing program I followed, from a different region, was also ending in 2018. The view that the IEPS no longer ran long-term programs was shared by many, both in the institute and outside it, and especially by those in Pichincha. Without its own project funding, the IEPS had to either find finances from other groups, such as the IFAD; organise projects in which other organisations paid for and carried out work on the ground; or run programs and projects on behalf of organisations (who provided the financing). Even for those programs that were ongoing—either because they had started earlier or used financing from other sources—many felt they were not being sufficiently followed up by IEPS staff. The difficulties with *seguimiento* were largely identified by both IEPS personnel and others as stemming from two key factors: a lack of flexibility in the bureaucratic schedule and a constantly shifting roster of personnel.

The former, according to IEPS staff, was largely due to cost-cutting measures. The department was unwilling to pay overtime or overnight travel expenses. Thus, meetings had to occur within a single day and, as much as possible, within normal office hours. This was difficult for both Zone 9 staff, as many locations within their purview were several hours' drive, and for potential beneficiaries, as the times available for meetings with staff were often when they themselves would be working. This inflexibility in the office schedule reinforced the flexibility in PSE actors' schedules. If the latter wanted to interact with the IEPS—either through a project or by simply going to the office to make an

inquiry—they had to find a way to get there during normal working hours. Frontline IEPS staff acknowledged the difficulties their rigid schedules created but had minimal ability to mitigate this. Staff both in and outside of Pichincha thought this was especially true for Zone 9 staff, as they were based in the same building as the national team. They all thought this meant they were subject to a higher level of surveillance and scrutiny. The rigidity in IEPS schedules effectively pushed the need for flexibility onto PSE actors. As with other development projects aimed at microentrepreneurs and the informal sector (Schuster 2015), the informality that PSE policy was supposed to help mitigate became an asset in dealing with the IEPS. As the institute was attempting to formalise PSE organisations, it simultaneously undercut aspects of that formalisation.

The other key difficulty for *seguimiento* was a high turnover of IEPS personnel (also commented upon in the IFAD report). The direct causes of turnover were related to shifting party politics; however, this was undergirded by neoliberal structures of precarity. The then president, Lenin Moreno, was making a concerted effort to remove perceived supporters of the previous president, Rafael Correa, from positions of authority within government institutions. This had a ripple effect, as newly instated heads of departments then replaced those below them, cascading downward. These political changes in personnel, however, were made possible through shifts in government employment practices, whereby permanent positions were against the norm. This was especially true for the IEPS since the fiscal crisis resulting from the crash in the price of oil in 2014.

Even if precarity has long been the norm for many in the Global South, the personnel changes in the IEPS represented an unusual level of instability, particularly when compared to other government departments. Staff frequently expressed both despair and frustration at the constantly shifting personnel and the consequent breakdowns in communication, often in comparison to their perceptions of other government organisations. Furthermore, these changes were part of a wider trend

in which many professions that were previously seen as relatively secure, especially in the civil service, have been rendered precarious—whether through less secure positions, less reliable access to employment, or simply insufficient income to recreate an anticipated lifestyle.³⁸ IEPS staff, therefore, had to always be on the lookout for a good opportunity, both with regard to their careers and the actual work they performed. Constantly seeking opportunities and the preparedness required to seize them shifted the temporal frame by which IEPS staff organised and ran programs, and thought about their own careers.

Similar to the observations of many anthropologists, especially those studying economic transformation and responses to neoliberalism, most of my interlocutors—government functionaries and program beneficiaries alike—tended to focus both on the extremely short-term and extremely long term (Jansen 2014; Streinzer 2016; Guyer 2007; Swartz 2018). The work of IEPS staff, for instance, primarily revolved around organising short term projects within a few months, while attempting to design them in such a way that they could conceivably contribute to the creation, growth, or strengthening of the PSE. Designing a multi-year program was simply never a consideration while I was there.

This was a substantial change for the IEPS. There had certainly been short-term programs previously. However, during my time in Ecuador, the institute did not contemplate any programs that were longer than six months and many were just one-off sessions. The programs that continued,

³⁸ These changes appear to be part of a global phenomenon. In Ecuador, the precarity of the public sector was largely embodied through the increase in *contratos ocasionales*—essentially fixed-term contracts. Similar reductions in the security of public sector employment have been observed by Lazar (2017) in Argentina and Freeman (2014) in Barbados. Though slightly dated, for an international quantitative analysis, see Graham, Birdsall, and Pettinato (2000).

primarily *ferias* (a program for government procurement from the PSE), were iterative, running annually or sometimes biannually. Even then, while some continued, others ceased. Yet more programs were uncertain as different government departments ran into conflicts as to whether they would run *ferias* or *catálogos* (two different types of procurement programs). Of the programs that either ran or were attempted during my fieldwork, nearly all were the result of IEPS staff swiftly seizing an opportunity as it arose.

An excellent example of the speed at which programs were organised, and how staff moved swiftly to seize an opportunity, was a training program organised by the IEPS on the administrative and tax obligations of PSE organisations. The local IEPS team in Pichincha had, as part of a separate project, been taking a census of registered PSE organisations in the region—going to each registered address and administering a long questionnaire. During this process, the team stumbled upon an association that offered free training courses to other registered PSE associations. Workshops were already a popular program among the IEPS, as they could often find a local organisation to host the event for free and convince a university professor to give a lecture *pro bono*. This particular association was formed from professional accountants. Speaking to the president of the association, he described their goal as giving back to the community. They had been lucky in their professions and so felt they had an obligation to pay it back to the community. The way they did this was by offering free training courses to PSE organisations on administrative and tax obligations. This suited the IEPS perfectly, as they had numerous contacts among PSE organisations who needed precisely this sort of advice, and

with the association they were able to give it for free. Talking to participants later, it proved to be a popular workshop.³⁹

While this story might appear serendipitous, it typified a lot of the work the local IEPS team did. It was organised and run within the space of roughly three months, perhaps less (it was unclear when the initial contact with the training association was made). The IEPS were constantly seeking out potential allies to help run programs, often seeking organisations to provide free inputs, whether they were material, labour, expertise, or otherwise. They were constantly focused on the near future. If there were any intimation that a program might go ahead, they moved swiftly to try and make it happen.

At the same time, the IEPS did attempt to operate strategically, in spite of the aforementioned instability. Similar to Guyer's (2007) discussion of public cultures of temporality in Britain and the US, when the focus of IEPS staff was not on the short term, it was often on the long term.⁴⁰ For many of my interlocutors, the long term described a distant future that existed not so much in evidence than as an aspect of faith. One example was when an IEPS staff member told me that Ecuador would only achieve the PSE when everyone had a different mentality. Similar to historic discussions of the socialist New Man, many IEPS staff felt that the PSE required an entirely different outlook and would only

³⁹ That the PSE—a supposedly alternative form of heterodox economy—found one of its most popular expressions in a workshop on accounting—an almost archetypal form of capitalist logic—was a contradiction that reoccurred regularly throughout my fieldwork. I explore this more in Chapter Four, when examining the call to establish an economic metric by which to measure the extent of the PSE's contribution to Ecuador's GDP.

⁴⁰ Guyer herself uses the term "presentism" to describe a focus on the immediate future. I avoid this, however, as the IEPS projects would still often take several weeks to a few months to organise—hardly 'the present'. Instead, I use 'short-term' to describe immediate, pressing concerns and quick projects, and 'mid-term' to describe programs that occur over several years (the standard length of earlier IEPS programs).

work once enough people's mentality had been changed. When this would occur was uncertain, but the constant stream of workshops dedicated to topics such as 'PSE leadership' attested to the faith proponents had that it was possible.

IEPS staff also often discussed the need for longer-term strategic thinking. In particular, they often spoke of the need to link different 'economic circuits' so that PSE actors supplied one another rather than being isolated. This, however, was embodied in discussions around trying to find projects that complemented one another, rather than running any long-term programs. It was a way of linking a series of short-term projects rather than creating anything ongoing. Furthermore, no one I spoke to had an example of such complementary projects in practice. These integrated 'economic circuits' continued to describe a hypothetical future when there would be enough PSE enterprises that they would be able to supply one another.

IEPS staff were aware of their inability to organise anything ongoing and how it weakened their ability to support the PSE. An example came during a morning meeting. For a few months, the local team held these weekly to discuss their work. At one meeting, the then acting director of the local team, Veronica, asked for broad suggestions about supports that could be offered for the PSE. Myra, another team member, suggested speaking to the management of the Plataforma Norte—a large government building in the inner north of Quito—and asking about holding a monthly PSE market there. This was a common support offered by the government to the PSE. A fair with several stallholders from the PSE was often organised by different government departments on various special occasions and public holidays throughout the year, usually held on government property. Both myself and other IEPS staff members were therefore a little taken aback by Veronica's strident rejection of this suggestion.

“We won’t solve anything with irregular spaces, that’s why I don’t fight for fairs (*ferias*),” she responded.⁴¹

Veronica continued to explain that she wanted space for the PSE, but ‘they’ (understood as the anonymous national government) preferred to give space to private enterprises because they get rent. This was a reference to a common complaint from IEPS staff, especially of the Pichincha team. The Plataforma Norte was a sleek new government building, not just an office but almost a small shopping centre, replete with food court and many retail outlets—all of which were expensive stores. The IEPS had wanted to try and establish PSE enterprises in those spaces, but apparently the managing authority had rejected the suggestion. Their proposed solution, according to Veronica, was a space once a month to sell some things—almost identical to Myra’s suggestion.

“No nos valua (they don’t value us),” said Veronica with exasperation.

For Veronica and many others in and around the IEPS, despite rhetoric from the wider government around the importance of the PSE, the inability or unwillingness to provide stability and permanence showed that it was not really valued by the wider government.

In part, this spoke to previously mentioned fears that people did not recognise the quality of PSE products. In a sleek new building with expensive shops and restaurants, PSE actors associated with the poor, informal economy had no place. More broadly, the instability and impermanence were reflective of the wider economic context and added to it. Without the ability to provide ongoing spaces for PSE enterprises, the IEPS were unable to provide any mid-term security for PSE actors. PSE caterers were locked into constantly reapplying for government contracts, which many feared would

⁴¹ This was not a reference to *ferias inclusivas*. Veronica was specifically referring to more typical fairs, in the sense of ‘fête’.

not continue, and other informal solutions—such as meal delivery or opening a restaurant from home. Project beneficiaries were, by and large, caught up in the same precarious economic situation as the IEPS and the instability of the institute often seemed to feed into PSE actors' precarity. Their experiences of it were different, but like the IEPS, they felt the need to *aprovechar las oportunidades*. By seizing opportunities, they were able to form livelihood strategies in the midst of economic precarity. At the same time, in doing so, PSE projects that were originally intended as responses to the precarity of neoliberal capitalism often became yet more threads holding together the patchwork existences of PSE actors.

Conclusion

The *rueda* was a site where many of the different economic logics that the IEPS navigated came together. Products embodied different conceptions of economy. Some were goods *de calidad* that fit with IEPS staff's conceptions of innovative, value-added products, often with a sense of tradition to them. Others were more typical of PSE associations, such as linen and agricultural products—'typical' in the sense that they would often be found at other IEPS programs in which production was geared toward the public sector. The actors present also highlighted different ideas of economy. 'Solidarity' was largely implicit, represented in the associations themselves. It was assumed that the way they conducted their business was 'solidary'.⁴² Being a 'popular' economy, the PSE had to be of the people, from their everyday experience. At the same time, it had to be something more than informal street trading—a distinction troubled by the presence of the cake seller. Even the business suits of the hoteliers and some of the PSE producers, which embodied more traditional visions of 'successful'

⁴² I speak more about how solidarity was largely located within the regulation of PSE associations in Chapter Six.

business, somewhat clashed with the polo shirts that were the unofficial uniform of PSE enterprises and the puffer vests with the IEPS logo that staff wore. One of the ways these disparate logics were melded together was through the idea that you have to *aprovechar las oportunidades*. These divergence logics and practices could be understood as being a melting pot from which opportunities would hopefully arise.

The pressure to seize opportunities in large part stemmed from how both IEPS staff and program beneficiaries were located within a broader neoliberal context in which time horizons were short. It was never certain where funding for the next program or batch of uniforms was coming from, and how long an IEPS staff member would remain in a position was rarely assured. This precarity was a result of the surrounding economic context but also fed into it. Just as how microcredit schemes often rely on and reinforce the flexible livelihood strategies they are designed to respond to,⁴³ despite theoretically being a response to the neoliberalisation of the economy, IEPS programs were centred around economic practices that primarily focused on small-scale production for an uncertain market. In this sense, *aprovechar las oportunidades* can be considered the other side of the coin to neoliberal precarity—its positive valence.

Precarity and the consequently felt need to seize opportunities was felt throughout the edifice that was the PSE, from producer to government functionary. It was not experienced equally, but was a constant background concern, at times coming to the foreground. If everyone was in the same boat, they were not all travelling the same class. Nevertheless, this complicates works such as that of Gago (2017), who looks at how neoliberalism is adopted as a strategy by those from below, and how their

⁴³ See: Ellison (2018), Falconer (2018), and Schuster (2014).

livelihood strategies feed into it in turn. While her descriptions of how Argentinians in the informal economy adopt neoliberal logics is thorough and insightful, in her book she describes various forms of solidarity economies legislated by progressive governments in the region, specifically Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, as a form of neoliberalism imposed from above. While the actions of the IEPS and government more broadly can certainly be seen as reinforcing neoliberal logics of precarity, this misses how precarity is experienced throughout the entire structure and how this mutual experience can be self-reinforcing. Everyone felt the need to *aprovechar las oportunidades*, even if precisely what the opportunities were and how they ought to be seized varied.

As highlighted by Sopranzetti (2017), simply treating the values and desires that drive people toward neoliberal economic action as false-consciousness assumes they are being fooled. In the case of Sopranzetti's interlocutors, motorcycle taxi drivers in Thailand, the concept of freedom was a highly motivating factor, while at the same time locking them into precarious livelihoods. However, it "became dominant not because it duped these workers or obliged them to conform to it, but because it connected the requirements of post-Fordist restructuring with the everyday desires and aspirations of its increasingly precarious workers" (Sopranzetti 2017, 79). In the case of the PSE in Ecuador, *aprovechar las oportunidades* connected the fragmented livelihood strategies that predominate under neoliberal capitalism with aspirations of both PSE actors and IEPS bureaucrats. I speak more about these aspirations in the next chapter.

Closer to my fieldsite, Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld (2015) have studied artisans producing textiles, primarily in Andean Ecuador. These groups, with their generally small-scale production, constantly shifting marketplaces, and constant innovation in designs resemble in many ways the PSE associations the IEPS worked with, although they appear more successful. The authors note that the need for constant innovation has been espoused by the Ecuadorian government since

the 1990s, under the assumption that production processes must always be shifting and improving. Similar to Sopranozetti, and with an excellent twist on Marx's famous adage, they note that "neoliberalism did not just bear down from the outside. Ecuadorians stepped up to live in the possibilities it offered. If these were not terms many would have chosen, small business owners still sought to make their own history by them" (Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld 2015, 163). *Aprovechar las oportunidades* was certainly a response to neoliberal precarity, one that had the potential to be self-reinforcing. This does not discount the meaning people felt in the concept, however; seizing opportunities was also how people pieced together livelihoods and connected them with class aspirations.

THREE

Socially Responsible PSE Entrepreneurs

For many people I spoke to who were employed to promote the Popular Solidarity Economy (PSE), there was a dilemma around what it took to do the job correctly.⁴⁴ Many felt it was not enough to simply promote the alternative economy, but that you had to live it. Experiencing the feelings and passions associated with the PSE was essential to promoting it. In the case of staff at the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS), this desire to be a part of the PSE tied into a wider practice of having ‘side hustles’ to earn a bit of extra money.

One of the clearest enunciations of the importance of being a part of the PSE, and its connection to engaging in an entrepreneurial enterprise, was by Matilde—a long-term staff member of the IEPS from outside Quito. Matilde was an early recruit and one of the relatively few employees with *nombramiento*—a permanent position. She had joined straight out of university, making her unusually young to have a permanent position. Between her comparatively long tenure at the IEPS

⁴⁴ By PSE promoters, I am referring to those who either worked or did other substantial labour in promoting the PSE. While IEPS staff made up the largest contingent of PSE promoters I spoke to, other government organisations, such as ConQuito, were also involved in the space, as well as several NGOs. Within this group, particularly those who worked at NGOs, there were many who preferred terminology other than the PSE (such as the Social Solidarity Economy). I refer to them all as PSE proponents for simplicity’s sake, noting preferences for different terminology where relevant.

and the master's degree in PSE she was studying, Matilde was one of the IEPS staff who was most well-versed in academic PSE theory. She had many frustrations about how the government rolled out the PSE in practice, but still believed that the alternative economy was a good idea, overall. For Matilde, government policy, while having its shortcomings, was on the whole positive in relation to the PSE.

One evening, after work, I asked Matilde whether she considered herself a part of the PSE.

“Yes,” she answered without hesitation.

“Yes?” I asked, hoping for more information.

“Yes. Why?” she responded, seemingly bemused by my question.

“Because others have said no. Others have told me that—”

Matilde cut me off before I could continue, “Of course [*claro*]! It's their lack of knowledge of what it [the PSE] is.” She continued to explain that she considered herself a part of the PSE for several reasons. These included the fact that she helped at the restaurant her mother ran out of her house—similar to some of the side hustles of other IEPS staff, albeit for her mother rather than herself. Matilde also felt that the fact that she put a lot of herself into her job—working days she wasn't supposed to and paying for expenses out of her own pocket—contributed to her being part of the PSE.

It was her final point, however, that Matilde lingered on. She said that she looked at those around her, not just her family but the society in which she lived, and saw that there ought to be a better guarantee for people's standard of living. To do that, she thought they needed to create more economic activity locally. Matilde noted that one of her dreams since she was a girl was to create an association or a cooperative, or any sort of local business, “not to get rich” but to generate local employment. That was why she, along with several members of a local NGO that supported PSE businesses, had formed an association. They sold packets of dried fruit made from surplus local

production that would otherwise go to waste. Matilde believed her work with the IEPS helped with this dream of generating local employment, but she really wanted to be a part of the PSE directly.

The association was short-lived, however. They sold opportunistically to friends, family, and other social contacts, as well as at local fairs. A number of locals were concerned by their activities, fearing that the new association was aiming to secure funding from various sources, including the IEPS, at the expense of other local producers. Matilde was adamant this wasn't the case—they were not vying for funding and their production did not compete with other local associations. Nevertheless, word got around and those members of the association who were also IEPS and NGO staff members were forced to resign from the association or lose their jobs. The legality of being both a part of a registered PSE association and a member of the IEPS was unclear. Matilde's manager insisted she could not be both, while she was adamant that the law said she could be.

More than the disagreement itself, Matilde was annoyed that the government was stopping people who were promoting the PSE from being a part of it.

“How can a functionary promote the PSE when they have never been a part of an association or a cooperative, when they don't know how hard it is to work with such a diversity of thoughts, of feelings?” she asked with frustration.

Matilde was voicing a common sentiment among IEPS staff—that it was not enough to simply know about the PSE, or even have a firm foundation in its academic theory. Instead, you needed a different mentality, a different way of thinking and feeling. This was commonly expressed as needing a “change of chip”, with the image being that of someone swapping their mentality the same way they swap a SIM card or computer chip. One IEPS member even once told me that promoting the IEPS would be an intergenerational challenge, as they would not really have established the PSE until everyone had changed their chip. In another example of the importance of praxis among IEPS staff,

a number of them formed a credit association. Speaking to one of the founders, they said this was their main motivation—it was at least one way they could be a part of the PSE as more than just advocates.⁴⁵

Not every IEPS or ConQuito staff member expressed a need to *be* a part of the PSE or had a long-term attachment to alternative economics. In comparison, Paulo was a member of Zone 9 who happened to join the same month I began my fieldwork. He was also replaced before I finished. Nevertheless, during his time there, I asked how he had come to work for the IEPS. The short answer was that he needed work, and some contacts had put him in touch.

“Here in this country,” he explained, “we’re not like ‘You know what? I like agriculture. I’m going to go and try to get a job in the Ministry of Agriculture.’ No, here it’s ‘You know what? I don’t have any work here. Where can I find a job?’”

He had previously worked providing technical assistance to small business, though his role had not really involved the PSE as either a policy framework or theoretical construct. When I asked how he found it to work with the PSE, he emphasised how it was different to his previous work, but he found similarities, particularly the promotion of small business. There were similar stories from other staff, such as one member who had previously worked in agricultural development for small farms. She no longer worked directly with agriculture, but said she still engaged a lot with farmers. She said that her previous engagement with *campesinos* gave her an appreciation for living a different lifestyle, implicitly linking the PSE to a ‘traditional’ agricultural lifestyle. Nevertheless, both of these staff members would move on before I had left Ecuador, and the programs they had been in charge of floundered as they were handed off to other staff.

⁴⁵ In that instance, in a different province to Matilde, the IEPS as an institution had no objection to their being both employees and association members.

There was not a simple dichotomy between long-term and short-term staff, however. Patty, (an IEPS staff member I talk about more in the next section), for example, had come and gone from the IEPS, even living in Europe for some time—all the while involving herself in alternative economy projects. Nor were there clear groups of those who were passionate about the PSE and those who were not. Instead, the contrast between Matilde and Paulo is more an example of different conceptions of being a government functionary. Matilde’s rhetorical question around having to be a part of the PSE to promote it was not only a commentary on how to be a part of the PSE but a comment on the type of bureaucrat she wanted to be—one who not only performed their work but lived it.

The side hustles and other entrepreneurial practices of IEPS staff were firmly not a part of their job. In Matilde’s case, she was told that if she continued the association, she would have to resign. Nor did all staff consider their side hustles to be a part of the PSE. Even so, for Matilde and a core of other staff, those practices were important to their labour as IEPS functionaries—it was what set them apart from other bureaucrats who simply carried out their work without regard to the lived realities of the PSE, without knowing what it was like. The image of the government functionaries Matilde was defining herself against strongly resembled the mechanistic portrayals of bureaucrats common among anthropologists following in a Weberian tradition (Graeber 2015, 2018; Gupta 2012; Herzfeld 1993). Instead, for those functionaries with a strong attachment to alternative economies, there was a desire for affective attachment to their labour.⁴⁶ In the efforts to *be* a part of the PSE through entrepreneurial

⁴⁶ As per the discussion in Chapter One, I continue to use ‘affect’ and ‘affective’ similar to Yanagisako’s (2002) “sentiments” and the “feelings” from the “structures of feelings”, which Williams (1977, 132) refers to as “thought as felt and feeling as thought”. This is opposed to approaches to affect that attempt to describe it as “presubjective without being presocial” (Mazzarella 2009, 291).

endeavours, the desire of IEPS staff and other PSE proponents to embody an ethical form of economy became entangled in understandings of class status as well as affectively charged ways of being a bureaucrat.

In this chapter, I explore the actions some proponents took to be part of the PSE and how this interacted with their class status and positionality as government bureaucrats. I first examine the forms of consumption encouraged by IEPS staff and how that interacted with their sense of middle-class status. In promoting the PSE, staff were often pushing for the production of the goods they themselves wanted to consume. Given the importance of ethical frameworks to middle-class consumption patterns, especially among my interlocutors, PSE products became entwined in wider discourses on ethical consumption—especially Fair-Trade and organic goods. I then discuss, through the example of a municipal government organisation also tasked with PSE promotion, how the production of PSE goods through microentrepreneurial enterprises tied the PSE to wider entrepreneurial discourses on affect and emotional attachment to one's labour. The affective dimension of labour was not just important for PSE producers, however. In the final section, I examine another side hustle of an IEPS staff member in order to explore how many PSE promoters, particularly among the IEPS, attempted to cultivate the right affective self through entrepreneurial activities. This was important for them to work better and differentiate themselves from more typical depictions of dispassionate bureaucrats. Given the precarious position of their employment and class status, even staff with permanent positions engaged in entrepreneurial endeavours to create a more permanent link to the PSE. For many IEPS staff, it was not enough to be knowledgeable about the PSE and government process in the abstract, it had to be lived.

Socially Responsible Class Consumption

There is a growing anthropological literature examining middle-class consumption in Latin America, generally focusing on consumption patterns as a way to signify social (generally class) distinction (Ariztia 2012; Dávila 2016; Dayton-Johnson 2015; O'Dougherty 2002; Thomas 2016). PSE proponents offer an uncommon position in relation to middle-class consumption patterns, as in their work and their side hustles they are often directly involved in both the consumption and production of PSE goods. They help establish particular middle-class tastes through their side hustles, the PSE enterprises they promote, and their own personal purchases. The dried fruits, cheeses, chocolates, agroecological produce, and handicrafts both produced and promoted by IEPS staff and other PSE proponents played a key role in not only establishing their own middle-class status but what forms of consumption were valid markers of status. The consumption of PSE proponents, however, despite their attention to *calidad*, is about more than simply taste and aesthetics. Similar to other forms of socially responsible consumption, especially the growth in Fair Trade since the late 1980s, participating in the PSE is about meaning and identity-making beyond simply establishing class status through conspicuous consumption. The consumption patterns of IEPS staff represented a connection to an imagined ethically charged international community. PSE products offered an opportunity to stake out an ethical terrain of what social values ought to matter.

Essential to this analysis is the near-universal middle-class status of my IEPS interlocutors. Many academic and popular observers of Latin America have noted that its newly emerging middle class, while large and growing, is both more precarious and heterogeneous than traditional conceptions that generally take their basis from twentieth-century labour patterns in the Global North (Castellani and Parent 2011; Ferreira et al. 2013; Franco, Hoppenhayn, and León 2011; Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012; O'Dougherty 2002). O'Dougherty's 2002 study is particularly instructive. Her work

offers an excellent analysis on the shifting boundaries and self-definitions of a segment of the Brazilian middle class in response to economic crisis. Notably, she makes a strong argument that an increased emphasis on consumption as a site of class differentiation was in large part a response to increasing precarity. With dwindling opportunities for stable jobs in the “noble professions” and decreasing purchasing power of those professions (in comparison to a new class of small-business owners who were rapidly gaining relative wealth and status), the “right” types of consumption became a key site for achieving or maintaining class status.⁴⁷

Defining the “right” types of consumption is, of course, an important site for the embodiment of power relations, one that intersects with other forms of social differentiation, especially race⁴⁸ and gender (Freeman 2014). While various anthropologists have noted that diverse middle class individuals use consumption to differentiate themselves from the poor,⁴⁹ remarkable across all these studies is the way it was also used by people to differentiate themselves from the rest of the middle class, especially from various conceptions of the *nouveaux riches*. As highlighted by O’Dougherty (2002), a close examination of this need to differentiate oneself from other segments of the middle class can provide a dangerous temptation to try and create a typology of different middle classes. Instead, anthropologists are best served by examining the dynamics of *how* middle-class people attempt to construct themselves as different, particularly through consumption, and what that means for their values and sense of self. Borrowing from Appadurai (1986), O’Dougherty describes the difference between different middle-class strategies of consumption as “tournaments of power”. In the case of

⁴⁷ See also: Dawkins (2011), Petit (2019), Winegar (2016), and Zhang (2011).

⁴⁸ See: Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2019), Dávila (2016), and O’Dougherty (2002, 2006).

⁴⁹ See: Ariztia (2012), Dávila (2016), and O’Dougherty (2002).

her interlocutors, spending large sums of money on a debutante ball or a trip to Disneyland were not just expenditure to claim status, they were claims around what sorts of expenditures ought to confer status. In the case of PSE consumption, while on a much smaller scale, similar claims were being staked—notably a connection to a worldly and ethical middle class.

Part of what sets particular patterns of middle-class consumption apart is the aesthetics; however, more important to the case of the PSE is the meaning behind the consumption. Across almost all ethnographic studies of middle classes in Latin America, the middle classes demonstrate an affective connection to internationalism (Ariztia 2012; Dávila 2016; Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012; O'Dougherty 2002; Peterson 2010). Whether through travel or consumption of imported goods, a connection to other nations was highly valued, particularly but not exclusively in in the Global North. Importantly, while often framed in analyses and popular commentaries as simply a luxury, as highlighted by O'Dougherty, the reasons for valuing international connections can be far more complex. Her interlocutors, for example, emphasised the enlightening aspects of international travel.⁵⁰ They often described an affective state of worldliness this travel was supposed to help cultivate. There are, however, other avenues of cultivation. A traditional strategy is embodying international connections and concerns through one's career, such as in Ellison's (2018) observations of NGO staff and government functionaries working in and around development. In a world in which being fixed to a geographic location is linked to both class and racial status (Gregory 2014), the ability to travel for leisure and work marks a distinct position in the division of labour from those whose movement is highly restricted. Internationalism can also be expressed through consumption, however, such as with

⁵⁰ See especially: O'Dougherty (2002, 44–45).

Fair Trade customers, who often describe the importance of thinking globally (Brown 2013; Linton 2012). Across all these groups, being a part of a global culture mattered.

Being linked to a global culture was only partially an end in and of itself, however. Part of the reason people value those international connections is also the ethical positioning they imply, at least in the eyes of certain middle-class subjects. While not wanting to dismiss the luxury involved in an international trip to Disneyland, treating it as simply a Veblenian (1925 [1970]) show of wealth and status through waste is reductive. As highlighted by Campbell (1994), consumption brings moral and ethical concerns to bear. Certainly, the extra expense of Fair-Trade products often implies a requisite level of wealth; however, ethical consumption is more than a simple expression of status—it is meaningful for consumers.⁵¹

As highlighted by Dombos (2008), with a few relatively recent exceptions, much of the literature on ethical consumption has focused on consumption in wealthy societies in the Global

⁵¹ There is a growing literature on ethical consumption; however, as highlighted by Dombos (2008, 127) until recently much of it has been “trapped in fruitless theoretical debate on whether ethical consumption is ‘viable’ and/or ‘truly transformative’”. While to call the debate “fruitless” is an exaggeration, much of the literature of Fair Trade and ethical consumption, especially authors writing from a development perspective, tends toward an evaluative stance, either implicitly or explicitly (e.g., Aptekar 2016; Ariztia, Agloni, and Pellandini-Simányi 2018; Barnett et al. 2005; Brown 2013; Ferrer-Fons and Fraile 2013; Linton 2012; Reichman 2008). This focus on whether or not ethical consumption can help restructure economies is understandable given the normative positioning of most academics working on development—they, like many of my interlocutors, want to see a change in the world and want to know what does and does not work. Nevertheless, Dombos (2008, 127) does make a strong argument that “what is needed is not jumping to fast conclusions about whether ethical consumption works or not or whether its proponents are motivated by authentic concerns or other factors, but rather a detailed empirical analysis of how it operates in particular socio-historical contexts.”

North.⁵² More ethnographic attention is needed to how ethical consumption operates in other societies. Recent studies from geography and sociology in particular have highlighted how outside of ‘the West’, many groups appear to consider the ethics of consumption through the lens of different values such as thrift and care (Ariztia, Agloni, and Pellandini-Simányi 2018; Hughes, McEwan, and Bek 2015; McEwan, Hughes, and Bek 2015). The results of my survey of PSE consumers in many ways reflected this. One store whose customers I surveyed was known for selling agroecological food. Many customers of the store listed the health benefits of chemical-free food (especially for their family) as one of the most important reasons to shop there. The environmental concerns of chemical use were rarely mentioned. Similarly, one of the most appreciated aspects of the store was that it made shopping for agroecological food relatively affordable. Since I have left Ecuador, other ventures aiming to make chemical-free food more accessible have also appeared in Quito, particularly to the south, which has traditionally been seen as a poorer part of the city, albeit still firmly middle-class. For the wider public, it appeared that ethical consumption involved similar values to those of other observers.

Nevertheless, my focus is on the promotion of PSE products as an explicit form of ethical consumption. This is much closer to the work of Dombos (2008), who studies the promotion of Fair Trade and organic food in Hungary—starting from a base in which it was relatively unknown until it became reasonably well-known. For Dombos (2008, 126), the promotion of these forms of ethical consumption represents a change in which “ethicality no longer depends solely on the consumer who has to behave in a certain way to be considered ethical, but there emerges a new cluster of goods and services that is invested with the meaning of being ethical”.

⁵² For a few examples of those exceptions, see: Ariztia, Agloni, and Pellandini-Simányi (2018); Dombos (2008); Hughes, McEwan, and Bek (2015); McEwan, Hughes, and Bek (2015).

This aligns with the work of Reichman (2008), who identifies a sense of alienation among consumers as one of the driving factors behind Fair Trade consumption. He notes that there is a dilemma for many middle-class professionals, especially those employed in areas distant from production processes. In many nations, they are living in contexts in which individuality is highly valued. At the same time, because of their distance from the production process, there is an ambivalence about expressing oneself through mass-produced commodities. Consuming Fair-Trade products, because of the meaning they are laden with, is one strategy to differentiate oneself as an ethical person who cares about coffee farmers in poor countries, for example. The success of Fair Trade “rests upon affective bonds between producers and consumers in the global division of labor” (Reichman 2008, 108). Importantly, more than the reality of such connections, it is the sense of connection and care that structures much of the consumption of middle-class buyers.⁵³

For those Dombos worked with, the ethics of these consumer goods was closely tied with perceptions of their being from Western Europe. In the case of Fair-Trade products, the vast majority entered Hungary from brands and distribution centres in countries such as Belgium and Austria. For organic food, although many producers had emerged in Hungary, Dombos argues that because it was primarily introduced by Western European expats, it is still highly associated with the relatively wealthy and ‘modern’ West. At the same time, Dombos emphasises that it is not primarily the material wealth of the West his interlocutors were associating themselves with—it was the imaginary of a strongly ethically aligned community. Notably in the case of Hungary, the ethics of consumption were tightly bound to what Dombos calls the “imaginary origins” of the goods. While the Fair-Trade coffee might

⁵³ See also: Silk (2004) for a similar discussion on care for distant others as structuring the practices and power relations of international aid chains.

have originated in the Americas, he notes that it was in large part the association with Western Europe that marked it as “ethical”.

The conflation of the ethics of a good and its association with an international community was strongly reflected in the promotion of PSE products in Ecuador. Although the products I saw were almost universally made in Ecuador, their *calidad* and style of promotion tapped into wider international currents around ethical consumption. At a time when leftist circles internationally were lauding the value consuming “local” products (B. Weiss 2016) as well as paying attention to the conditions of production of goods (Brown 2013; Linton 2012), PSE products were clearly responding to similar desires of many in the Ecuadorian left, particularly among the middle class. My interlocutors did not appear as Western-focused as those of Dombos, though ‘Europe’ did sometimes feature in informal conversation as a place where ethical consumption was considered mainstream. Many of my interlocutors, though not a majority, had spent at least some time in Europe or the United States; however, other examples of international travel also featured. A pair of PSE experts were flown in from Argentina for a three-day workshop with IEPS staff as part of an exchange agreement. Several staff from an Ecuadorian NGO that was focused on PSE promotion were hired to go to Columbia to set up a similarly styled PSE enterprise. One IEPS staff member went on a government-funded trip to present at a Social Solidarity Economy conference in Mexico. There was a very real regional network of PSE experts that many of my interlocutors were either a part of or were making active efforts to participate in.

In their connection to this international network, PSE products represented both an ethical positioning and a sign of class. They were not solely status goods whose purpose was simply to differentiate the consumer from others of lower status. Many IEPS staff were emphatic that PSE products, while ideally being good quality, ought to be more accessible—they often critiqued prices

that were only affordable to *pelucones* (a pejorative term for the wealthy, especially the nouveaux riches). At the same time, when it came to the PSE products, stores, or market stalls that my interlocutors got the most excited about, they were almost always goods with a certain *calidad*. They were made in Ecuador but reflected localised versions of international tastes. Similar to O’Dougherty’s (2002) understanding of “tournaments of power”, the consumption and promotion of PSE products was not only about directly accruing status but concerned the “dispositions of the central tokens of value in the society in question” (Appadurai 1986, 21). At the same time as PSE goods could potentially represent status in the eyes of a segment of the Ecuadorian middle class, their promotion was also a way of influencing what values ought to matter, at least among that segment of the population. In the form promoted by many of my interlocutors, the PSE represented a stake in the claim to a set of ethical values, embodied through consumption, and was tied to what was perceived to be an international community of similarly socially conscious people. At a time when traditional markers of middle-class status were difficult to both obtain and maintain, the PSE was one response of how to embody an ethical, middle-class life.

ConQuito

ConQuito provides a key example of how the sorts of enterprises that were often idealised by PSE proponents were intertwined with their perceptions of both the importance of affect and passion to PSE work and class status. It was an organisation with a similar purpose to the IEPS. Rather than belonging to the national government, however, ConQuito was a creation of the municipal government. A formal partnership between the municipality, several universities, and a variety of other stakeholders, the organisation was tasked with promoting the economic development of the metropolitan region. One of ConQuito’s principal departments was Fortalecimiento Productivo y

EPS.⁵⁴ Although the PSE was officially one aspect of many avenues of economic support, ConQuito was prominent in providing assistance to PSE actors in the region. Many of the PSE associations and cooperatives I spoke to had either received support from ConQuito or had even been formed by them, only later discovering the IEPS. Across the board, feedback I received from PSE actors about ConQuito was positive. Despite the fact that the organisation was highly regional (it only officially worked within the metropolitan area of Quito, not even the whole of Pichincha) and that PSE promotion was officially only a small part of its remit, ConQuito was a significant player in the PSE within my fieldsite.

Part of the reputation of ConQuito stemmed from its stability. The municipality of Quito had undergone massive political change while ConQuito had been around, moving from a mayor who was a Correa supporter to one who was staunchly opposed. During this time, ConQuito had moved from having a positive relationship with the IEPS to IEPS staff being unofficially told not to cooperate with them. With the election of Moreno, both IEPS and ConQuito staff reported that relations were thawing. Throughout this period, ConQuito appears to have been the more stable institution. For example, Teresa, my main contact at ConQuito, had worked there the whole time. In comparison, very few IEPS staff had been employed across the same period. The one staff member who worked somewhat closely with ConQuito, both before and after the political freeze, was someone who had worked at the IEPS, left, and recently returned. ConQuito had managed to embed itself as an institution in the minds of many Quiteños in a way that the IEPS had struggled to match.

⁵⁴ A very literal translation of this would be 'Productive Strengthening and PSE'; however, a more accurate version would be more akin to 'Strengthening productive processes and PSE'.

The offices of ConQuito resided in the inner south of Quito. They were one neighbourhood over from the Panecillo—the hill, and the angel atop it, that had once marked the southern extent of the city. Over recent decades, however, Quito has sprawled much further south. The building conjured up a modern-traditional aesthetic that was reminiscent of left-wing spaces in Ecuador broadly—a similar linkage between modernity and a stylised traditional past embodied in the cake from the previous chapter. Until recently, the neighbourhood had still not undergone the extensive gentrification that other neighbourhoods in Quito had experienced, especially in the inner north. In recent years, nearby parks had been renovated and many of the nearby houses were becoming more firmly middle-class, though the area more broadly still had a reputation for being unsafe. The ConQuito building itself in some ways felt like an aspiration for what the neighbourhood could be.

As per many aesthetic aspects related to the PSE and modernity, ConQuito's office managed to represent both a clean, prosperous, and safe modernity, while also highlighting tethers to a stylised traditional past. The outside of the building was a beautiful, white-washed structure. The only hint of modernity was a glass external lift installed for disabled access to the upper floors—an uncommon feature in Ecuador. Inside, everything was sleek and wood panelled. The style was in line with images of tech company headquarters but with 'traditional' twists—the wood panelling was a shade darker than that seen in many modern offices, and hints of older architecture showed through the modern fittings. At the same time, aside from bearing a bold, modern design, there were power points everywhere and everyone worked at late-model workstations. Similar to the cakes from the previous chapter, this represented a novel combination of tradition and modernity.

Fortelecimiento Productivo y EPS was headed up by Teresa. She described herself as young (late twenties) and had a background in promoting entrepreneurship, having previously worked for an

organisation that acted as an angel investor.⁵⁵ Her team was relatively young as well, and she said she liked that, as they were willing to experiment and try new things. This emphasis on experimentation and innovation carried through into her work. Teresa emphasised that a lot of the work of her department involved convincing PSE actors that innovation was not just for tech companies, that even microenterprises could innovate, even if it was just in the ingredients of their products or the way in which they served their customers.

Teresa saw the work of her team in promoting the PSE as promoting an entrepreneurial mentality among participants. In all her projects, and similar to the *rueda* in the previous chapter, she saw the quality of products as essential. This applied to workshops that ConQuito ran, markets they organised, and any other events of theirs. For markets, this idea of quality also extended to the market itself—to be good quality, the market needed to be well-presented and have a good variety of products. Teresa critiqued markets held by other government departments, without naming them, saying that they were often filled with products of mediocre quality or simply many stalls all selling the same thing, which was not interesting for consumers. Her description matched the informal sellers and popular markets that are spread throughout Quito. By Teresa's standards, these were not markets *de calidad*.

One event organised by ConQuito was for Mother's Day. It was both similar to the PSE markets organised by national government organisations (such as the IEPS) and also a world apart.

⁵⁵ 'Angel investor' is traditionally a term for individuals (and more recently, occasionally groups) who provide capital for start-ups. They normally invest in extremely high-risk ventures while expecting exceedingly high returns. There is normally a very loose distinction between angel investors and venture capitalists, in that the former tend to be assumed to have motives other than profit (though this is definitely expected) and take a more passive role in the running of a company. The difference is largely a matter of perspective, however.

Firstly, it was being held in Quicentro Sur—a massive shopping centre to the South of Quito. Although not as expensive as its sister to the north, the prices in Quicentro Sur were generally out of reach for poorer Ecuadorians. Secondly, the merchandising of the stalls was far more professional than anything I had seen at other PSE markets. In comparison to regular PSE markets, at most Mother’s Day market stalls, products were neatly arrayed with effective and eye-catching branding. Almost all the organisations had some sort of pamphlet or business card professionally designed and printed in colour—a stark contrast to other PSE markets where branding was minimal, and most handouts (if there were any) were black and white photocopies.

The products themselves also stood out as markedly different. The variety was immense, with almost no replication of stalls. In comparison, at many PSE markets, the same products appeared over and over again. The objects for sale were also quite distinct. There were homemade games for children that encouraged learning and fortresses made from recycled card that children could colour in. There were chocolates with beautiful photos of Quito printed on top made by a young woman with a physical disability. A particularly popular stall sold *mistelas*—a traditional Quiteño lolly whose recipe, according to the young women who made them, had almost been lost to time. There was also a large variety of handmade jewellery and crafts, and even a registered PSE association that specialised in growing succulents. In many ways, the products of these stalls were more like the PSE side hustles of IEPS staff rather than those of most PSE associations, being more expensive, diverse, and novel. More time and money did appear to be invested in them than IEPS staff spent on their side hustles, however.

Talking to Teresa, who also organised the event, these distinctions from more common PSE markets were entirely intentional. She prided herself on the organisation of the market, noting how it really stood out from other events. There was a strict application process to be a part of the market, with her team judging potential stallholders along a matrix that emphasised the quality and originality

of their products, with the aim of having a large variety of high-quality products on offer. Teresa noted that being a small producer or an association added points to an application. Hence, though they theoretically could have been allocated stalls, no large businesses were part of the market. Stallholders were also judged along a set of social criteria (such as providing employment to disabled people, caring for the environment, etc.); however, Teresa herself acknowledged that, at the market, they really emphasised appearance—not just of an individual stall, though it was important, but how the market as a whole appeared.

Adding to this, she noted that because applicants paid to be a part of the market, she felt they were customers who deserved respect. At the same time, this also tapped into a critique I heard from several sources of IEPS programs—they were free. Teresa emphasised that it was important that all of ConQuito's programs involved a co-contribution from beneficiaries. ConQuito was a not-for-profit and subsidised the programs, but participants still had to pay.

“Maybe they pay a dollar,” Teresa explained, “but they pay.”⁵⁶ The idea is that people also identify and feel the commitment of paying. If people think that it's free, they think that it doesn't work and don't value it. So, we started the process of charging fees four years ago. Before, we didn't charge. People didn't come. There wasn't commitment.”

I heard similar comments from others working in the PSE space. One elected local government official, whose duties included promoting the PSE, said she thought it was part of the success of the workshops she organised. The local government organised the space and the educator,

⁵⁶ Teresa explained that there were a few exceptions to this. Despite being an organisation for the development of Quito, ConQuito was sometimes hired by other municipalities to run programs. In those instances, sometimes the local municipality would pay program fees on behalf of participants.

but participants had to buy the materials (three to four dollars for most programs). IEPS programs, as a rule, generally did not require payment from individuals for things like workshops. However, programs in which the IEPS helped associations buy machinery (none of which were started during my time in Ecuador) required co-contributions on the part of the association. This was generally only 20 per cent of the overall cost and often structured as a repayment to the IEPS. Nevertheless, staff often framed this as the association's commitment (*compromiso*).

Teresa's emphasis on the importance of payments, and the broader labelling of such payments as "co-contributions" taps into entrepreneurial logics on several levels. Firstly, it shifted the overall description of the programs. While IEPS and ConQuito staff definitely labelled their programs as "assistance" (often *ayuda*, sometimes *asistencia*), programs requiring co-contributions were not straight welfare, which is antithetical to neoliberal economic logics. Instead, programs were framed as a combined commitment between two stakeholders. Such a framing of commitment on the part of two parties elides the unequal sizes between them. This is similar to neoliberal structures in which employment is constructed as an agreement between two nominally equal enterprises. The employee or contracted enterprise is conceptually equal to the contracting business, even if in practice the two are of vastly different sizes (Gershon 2011; Shever 2008). In the case of the Mother's Day market, Teresa described participants as "clients" (*clientes*), using the word to emphasise that ConQuito had a commitment to them. *Clientes* had paid money, they therefore deserved a certain level of service, just as paying their fee had demonstrated a certain level of commitment.

ConQuito therefore gave stallholders training in merchandising and made sure everything needed was present. Teresa contrasted this with other markets she had been invited to, where there was no organisation, no information about the layout, and not even chairs. In comparison, she emphasised that before the market had opened, she herself had gone around to each stall and made

sure their presentation was up to standard, both for herself and so that they had the best chance at selling their wares. This was the second-largest annual market organised by ConQuito, and Teresa was rightfully proud of its success. Customers were happy with the stalls and products, and, from all accounts, the stallholders were happy with their sales.

Sheer sales were not the only metric of success for Teresa, though they were certainly important. Success was also felt. The second important aspect of Teresa's comments around co-payments was the emphasis on feeling. She emphasised how participants should identify themselves with the program, and that they "feel" the commitment. Teresa also talked about another ConQuito program that focused on increasing the dollar-value of products of PSE enterprises, one of their "star programs". Teresa described how the program outcome wasn't just increased income, it made the work of the enterprises more enjoyable.

"People have been doing the same thing for years, but with added value, they come, and they enjoy doing it."

I talk more about 'added value' in Chapter Five; however, it is important to note here that in the context of our conversation, Teresa was not saying that it was simply the extra money that made the artisans enjoy their work. She proceeded to tell me about an association of women she had worked with who made dolls from *masapán*—a special type of dough used for sculpting. The practice is traditionally associated with Calderón, near Quito. According to Teresa, the group had been making dolls for over thirty years. As part of the ConQuito program, they had created new designs and started selling to new segments of the market. Apart from their business success, it also apparently left the association with renewed confidence in what they were doing.

"And that's what we in the PSE area [of ConQuito] always achieve," Teresa explained with pride, "That people feel *satisfied* with what they do (*De que la gente se sienta satisfecha con lo que hace*)."

Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld (2015), who study artisanal production in Ecuador and Colombia, remind us to take portrayals of artisans as passionate craftsmen with a large grain of salt. In their discussions with many artisans in Ecuador and Colombia, they found that for most, while the work might be more or less enjoyable, it was first and foremost a business and they would go into different work if there were more profit to be made elsewhere. Nevertheless, regardless of the actual subjectivities of the artisans themselves, Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld highlight the work such narratives do in mustering support for particular styles of production—typically small business with practices of flexible production, often tinged with a sense of connection to ‘tradition’, albeit ‘tradition’ diversely defined.⁵⁷

Throughout the PSE as a policy framework, there was an emphasis on the affective attachment to work—either doing something you are passionate about, or that helps satisfy emotional needs in other ways (such as allowing time to spend with your family or allowing a disabled family member to contribute financially to the household and feel “valued”). Many other anthropological analyses of entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism more broadly have noted a similar emphasis on the affective aspects of labour, particularly the importance of being emotionally invested in one’s work and the careful management of one’s affective self (e.g., Freeman 2014, 2020; Geiger 2020; Purnima and Gupta 2016; Shever 2008; Yanagisako 2002). For many PSE proponents, this attention to affect was not solely for the PSE actors they were promoting. As seen in Matilde’s opening comment, they thought that having the right experiences and feelings was essential for their work as well.

⁵⁷ Chapter six of their book offers an excellent discussion on how ‘tradition’ can mobilise production while being understood very differently by the various actors involved.

Becoming an Entrepreneurial Bureaucrat

When discussing entrepreneurialism, I am borrowing the term ‘entrepreneurial’ from my interlocutors in Ecuador. My fieldwork was suffused with the words *emprender*, *emprendedor*, and *emprendimiento*. They could be translated as “to undertake”, “small business owner”, and “undertaking” (in the sense of a business venture); however, for my interlocutors, they could also be easily translated as “to try something entrepreneurial”, “entrepreneur”, and “an entrepreneurial project”. My interlocutors rarely felt the need to distinguish between them.

Not all PSE activities had to be entrepreneurial. Proponents often talked about other forms of communal economic activity, such as *minga* (a traditional form of collective labour), community kitchens, and mutual childcare. In practice, however, nearly all activities promoted by the IEPS and other government departments were microenterprises. They were sometimes formally registered and often marketed to consumers through relatively informal or insecure means. In this regard, they were very similar to the types of businesses often encouraged in microfinance schemes. In fact, the IEPS often helped PSE actors with access to credit, typically through government schemes, often through credit associations and cooperatives, and sometimes even through private banks (though the latter was rare and more typically organised by PSE actors independently of the IEPS).

While IEPS staff often engaged in microentrepreneurial enterprises that overlapped with those of their beneficiaries, they represented different experiences of entrepreneurialism. For most PSE actors, while their *emprendimiento* was rarely their sole source of income, it was often one of their more significant ones. On the other hand, for IEPS staff, theirs were often closer to what has recently been

labelled in English as a ‘side hustle’—a venture in addition to your primary work for extra money.⁵⁸ Although some had dreams of further expansion, in many cases, the extra money was marginal at best, and most of my interlocutors did not have plans to make them into their full-time business. I therefore follow other anthropologists studying entrepreneurialism (Freeman 2014; Sopranzetti 2017) in analysing entrepreneurial endeavours not just as sources of income but as projects of self-making. Importantly, this is a deeply affective act. In the case of IEPS staff, it was not just about remaking the self as a PSE actor but as a different type of bureaucrat.

There is a large and growing anthropological literature that examines the importance of affect to the work of bureaucrats (Ansell 2014; Cooper 2019; Cowan 2020; Lazar 2017, 2018; Lea 2008; Nading 2017; Street 2012). These works even appear to substantially outnumber accounts of Weberian

⁵⁸ Although the word ‘chamba’ is sometimes used in Ecuador in a similar sense to ‘side hustle’, my interlocutors never used it. Instead of using a catch-all to describe their diverse ventures, they tended to describe them individually (e.g., “I help my partner out with his lunch delivery business on the weekend.” Or “I want to start an association with my neighbours to make jams and sell them at local festivals.”). I use ‘side hustle’ to emphasise the links to modern entrepreneurial work cultures that appear to be coming to prominence around the world. ‘Side hustle’ specifically, despite being linked to many of the works on entrepreneurialism cited here, is under-theorised in the anthropological literature. However, there appears to be a burgeoning literature in management and entrepreneurial studies that emphasises the effects of side hustles on “empowerment” and “innovation” (e.g., Forster-Holt 2020; Sessions, Nahrgang, Vaultont, Williams & Bartels 2021), reinforcing the self-making aspects of modern entrepreneurialism. This literature also reflects what appears to be a potentially burgeoning racial and class distinction in the concept of the side hustle. An entrepreneurial venture ‘on the side’ when undertaken in a Western country or by a member of a Westernised elite is a ‘side hustle’. For someone poorer outside of the West, and most likely a person of colour, this would simply be ‘informal work’.

(1978) bureaucrats who are detached and dispassionate (e.g., Graeber 2015, 2018; Gupta 2012; Herzfeld 1993). Even many anthropological works that address attempts at standardisation in bureaucratic decision-making tend to emphasise how, rather than doing away with subjective value judgements, it merely masks them (Hoag 2014; Scherz 2011).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the imagery of emotionless, even mechanical bureaucrats appears to have a prominent place in the popular imagination of bureaucracy. Matilde's critique from the opening of this chapter—that functionaries needed to experience the PSE in order to promote it—implicitly positioned her against bureaucrats that were not passionate for alternative economics, and were, by comparison, just there to work. In comparison to accounts of bureaucracy in which the work of government functionaries serves to hide the role of affect, for many public servants employed to promote the PSE, affect was explicitly an important part of their labour. In Matilde's terms, thoughts and feelings were essential to their work.⁶⁰

In this section I examine how the need to subjectively experience the PSE and have a passion for the alternative economy intersected with the affective dimensions of entrepreneurialism, both as an economic practice and a technique of self-making. As government staff used entrepreneurial ventures to cement themselves as belonging to the PSE itself, they constructed their PSE identities around precarious economic practices. At the same time, for those who did not have *nombramiento*, those same practices worked to hedge their PSE identity against the precarity of their employment.

⁵⁹ This literature also intersects with works on 'audit cultures' that look at how technologies of auditing and transparency often work to discipline labour and obscure the normative evaluations behind the development of such technologies (Shore 2008; Shore & Wright 2015; Strathern 2000a, 2000b).

⁶⁰ The role of thought in PSE promotion is addressed further in Chapter Six in a discussion of the importance of having 'the right mentality'.

For those passionate about the PSE but who lacked secure employment, entrepreneurial practices could maintain one's attachment to the PSE—whether as an acknowledged 'expert' in the field or as an actual actor in the PSE itself—even when employment shifted.⁶¹

Patty offers an example of someone whose passion for alternative economies went unquestioned, even when she herself shifted in and out of the IEPS. She knew Matilde both through work and through the Master of PSE degree they were taking together. Like Matilde, Patty was engaged in a side hustle that was largely geared toward embodying an alternative economy. She was well-versed in PSE theory but rarely used the term 'Popular Solidarity Economy'. Instead, she preferred 'Social Solidarity Economy'. She said that, for her, the 'PSE' referred strictly to Ecuadorian government policy, of which she had many critiques. Like many others critical of the specific *Popular Solidarity Economy* formulation, she also emphasised that just because something was popular did not mean it had to be solidary. Instead, she preferred to use Social Solidarity Economy as, for her, it referred to the broader idea of an alternative economy—one that was necessarily founded in values of solidarity.

Patty also noted that the Social Solidarity Economy was the term more commonly used internationally. Using it signified a connection to a global discourse, rather than a local one—a reflection of Patty's background. At the start of my fieldwork, Patty was a recent hire by the IEPS. However, similar to Sebastian from the previous chapter, she had been employed there previously several years ago. In the interim she had lived, worked, and studied in Europe, generally in areas related

⁶¹ There is a suggestive similarity here to Sapir's (1924) classic critique of modern working culture as "fragmenting" the individual, leaving their means for economic subsistence divorced from a sense of culturally meaningful work. Further longitudinal work on the relationship between people's 'side hustles', their careers, and their sense of self would offer a potentially fruitful avenue for further research.

to alternative economies, and had only recently returned to Ecuador with her family. Patty's international connections and strong command of several languages, including English, marked a firm middle-class status, although she herself often spoke about her concerns of making a living given Ecuador's precarious economic and political environment. We even regularly discussed options for her family to emigrate, as she thought there would be limited economic options available for her children if the government continued to shift to the right. Despite her international connections being very important to Patty's sense of self, she was also focused on the local through interest in the Social Solidarity Economy and her entrepreneurial endeavour.

I got a glimpse of Patty's local side hustle when she invited me to visit her family's property just outside a small town to the north of Quito. Her husband had built a beautiful small house on it. Located on a steep hill, he had built the house from wood with one wall made almost entirely of windows, looking out across the local mountains. The vista of orchards and sweeping forests was idyllic and, combined with the simple but expertly made construction of the house (her husband was a professional builder), managed to both be a luxury that many middle-class Quiteños aspired to and yet also a representation of bucolic simplicity. Without columns or painted plasterwork, nothing about the aesthetic of the house matched the hacienda-inspired homes relatively common among the rural getaways of other city-dwellers. The house's appearance, while unique in its own way, had a lot in common with other houses and buildings I spent time in belonging to PSE proponents and middle-class left-wing Ecuadorians more broadly. Without looking anything like the ConQuito office, it reminded me of the headquarters' combination of 'modern' and 'traditional' aesthetics.

There were several fruit trees on the property, primarily granadilla and mandarins. As Patty and her family showed me around, we tromped through the high grass collecting fruit. They took a bag home and gave me a bunch as well—almost too many for one person to eat. The rest they were

going to take to an organic food shop in Quito, where they sold them. The day's pickings were going to net them about five or six dollars—enough for a moderately expensive lunch in Quito, no more. They had plans to plant more trees, but there was not enough land for harvesting fruit to become a self-sustaining venture.

Beyond planting more fruit trees, Patty and her family had ideas of other things to do with the property. Due to the hill, much of the house was raised off the ground with space underneath. There was already a pair of large sinks installed, and Patty was hoping to get a few neighbouring farmers together to form an association to make jams and preserves from their produce. When being told about this, I cracked a joke about their registering with the IEPS. Patty immediately and emphatically said no. She was a part of the IEPS, she said, and knew how it worked. They wouldn't register until the government made some changes. Aside from her perceptions of the general inefficiency of the IEPS, Patty was afraid that if they formally registered as part of the PSE, they would be pushed to engage with the Ministry of Agriculture, who encouraged the use of chemical fertilisers. While nothing in the PSE law or literature specifically restricted their use, the general emphasis by PSE proponents on both protecting the environment and a holistic sense of health meant that the use of chemicals in agriculture and food production was generally frowned upon. Despite her critiques of government policy, however, Patty described the group she was trying to pull together as her way of trying to live the Social Solidarity Economy. Being slightly more jaded than Matilde, Patty said that most of her colleagues lacked this passion for the Social Solidarity Economy, but that her and a small core—the group that was trying to establish the credit association—were doing their bit to try and live the

alternative economy. These entrepreneurial ventures were in large part what set them apart from other bureaucrats.⁶²

Many scholars working in a Foucauldian vein describe entrepreneurialism as a process of self-making,⁶³ a subjectivity,⁶⁴ or both (Freeman 2014, 2020; Gershon 2014, 2016). Much of this analysis has its origins in Foucault's 'The Birth of Biopolitics', in which he described *homo economicus*—the subject of neoliberalism—as “an entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault 2004, 226). Under this schema, people are responsible for themselves and their own success, with the latter being primarily conceived as success in the marketplace. They are mini businesses, according to Martin (2000, 582), “[collections] of assets that must be continually invested in, nurtured, managed, and developed”.

Martin's words well describe the other set of personal projects that many IEPS staff engaged in. These were not exactly microentrepreneurial but fit under the wider rubric of self-making and self-branding associated with it. Carmen, one of the few Zone 9 staff with *nombramiento*, for instance, was

⁶² It is worth noting there are strong similarities between this discourse on the importance of having the right thoughts and feelings for the PSE and the discourse of religious development organisations. Bornstein's (2005) work in particular shows how there are deep resonances between modern Christian thought and development based on neoclassical economic models. In Ecuador, the IEPS and ConQuito are firmly secular institutions and staff at both organisations never talked about religion while I was there. Nevertheless, Ecuador itself is a deeply religious country, and many of the most enduring NGOs were originally founded by church groups (especially Salesian missions), even if their modern status was formally secular. Two of the most important organisations in the space—Grupo Salinas and FEPP—were founded and until recently still run by extremely charismatic priests, for example. Therefore, religious undercurrents could still flow through officially secular organisations.

⁶³ See, for example: Sopranzetti (2017) and Win (2014).

⁶⁴ See, for example: Faas (2018) and Martin (2000, esp. 582).

a regular attendee at conferences related to the PSE and even managed to receive funding to deliver a presentation at an international conference—an unusual allowance during a time of fiscal austerity. Aside from that, she was in the final stages of closing a deal to write a book about how to promote the PSE, further establishing her credentials as an expert. Carmen had previously been a highly successful dealer in Indigenous art, travelling internationally to sell her wares. Through both her past and side projects, she had developed many skills that were useful to the IEPS, just as her work at the institute provided the experience to continue to develop those skills.

There is more to entrepreneurialism than a form of economic rationality, however. Freeman, in her examination of entrepreneurialism in Barbados, has argued strongly that rather than simply a “vehicle for income generation” or “an economic matter of business”, entrepreneurialism is a subjectivity—“a subtle, generalised way of being and way of feeling in the world” (Freeman 2014, 1). At the same time, while undoubtedly a global phenomenon, it is neither universal nor homogenising, and several anthropologists have highlighted that entrepreneurialism takes on new forms and new local meanings in different contexts (Freeman 2014; Ong 2006; Sopranzetti 2017). For many IEPS staff, this meant recreating themselves as directly a part of the PSE; however, importantly, they were becoming PSE actors at the same time as they were becoming better bureaucrats.

Despite primarily talking to ‘entrepreneurs’ in the more popular sense of the word (i.e. the founders of relatively small, highly profitable but risky businesses)—Freeman’s (2014, e.g., 31 & 45) Barbadian interlocutors often used bureaucrats, bureaucracy, and government work as the foil to compare themselves against. In doing so, they highlighted their own superior measures of reputation and respectability. The rise of entrepreneurialism in Barbados fits into the previously mentioned wider remaking of middle-class status, with reputation and respectability forming a local contextualisation of the broader trend. Importantly, however, a large part of the appeal of entrepreneurialism for Freeman’s

interlocutors is a sense that being an entrepreneur involves passions and emotions that contrast with perceptions of stolid bureaucrats obsessed with hierarchy, propriety, and proper processes. In Italy, Muehlebach (2013, 454) has observed a similar rejection of the perceived “coldness” of the state, even by explicitly anti-neoliberal activists who object to its withdrawal from the provision of welfare. Even they still feel the appeal of neoliberal forms of care, namely volunteerism, that are perceived as coming from “the warmth of citizens’ hearts.”

Matilde, Patty, and other government functionaries employed in PSE promotion were in large part pushing back against this almost Weberian image of the bureaucrat. Many frontline IEPS staff, with whom I spent most of my time, commonly critiqued the anonymous administrators who supposedly handed down IEPS policy without ever knowing what it was like to be part of the PSE. They were never explicitly named but instead formed an anonymous foil against which staff could display their own ethical positionality. In comparison to Graeber’s (2015) emphasis on bureaucracy as forcing everyone to assume a single perspective, for many employed in PSE promotion, being a good functionary was not about dispassionate rationality but understanding and experiencing the emotions and values of those they worked with.

Conclusion

The part-time PSE enterprises of IEPS staff represented an entwining of class, ethical, and professional aspirations. Not every staff member framed their side hustle as an attempt to live the PSE. For some, it was simply a way to earn a little extra money or help relatives with their own endeavour. Nevertheless, those who used entrepreneurial activities to cement their connection to the PSE were almost universally those who had been engaged in and around alternative economies the longest. As in Patty’s case, this did not necessarily mean they were consistently employed at the IEPS. Many PSE proponents

moved through different organisations—in the public service, academia, NGOs, and even the private sector. Nevertheless, side projects often formed a consistent affective link to the wider project of creating and promoting alternative economies. Even for those who had relatively stable employment in the IEPS, side hustles marked an important connection to the PSE—it helped them to be better bureaucrats.

The PSE, as both a policy framework and a theoretical construct, is explicitly about the rejection of simple economic rationality and the incorporation of diverse social values into economic considerations. This necessarily requires its proponents to have an affective relation to the PSE. That IEPS staff cultivate their affective self through entrepreneurial endeavours is significant. Again, it is worth emphasising that a lot of the academic literature and popular discourse on the PSE emphasises a wide variety of practices that are not entrepreneurial endeavours. And yet, proponents at the IEPS, ConQuito, and even NGOs I spoke to almost all used entrepreneurial enterprises and practices to become a part of the PSE.

This linkage between entrepreneurialism and the PSE had a variety of consequences. Firstly, like other forms of ethical consumption, PSE products (in the forms idealised by those working in PSE promotion) were very much linked to middle-class consumption patterns. PSE consumption was not simply about class differentiation. For many I spoke to, making ethical products more visible and accessible to wider sections of Ecuadorian consumers was an important aspect of the PSE. Nevertheless, in promoting or directly producing the products they were particularly attracted to, IEPS and ConQuito staff were staking a claim in the ethical values of both the PSE and middle-class Ecuadorian society. In particular, the forms IEPS, ConQuito, and NGO staff favoured often emphasised a connection to an international ethical community. Rather than directly symbolising the

status typically associated with foreign goods, PSE products pointed to the presumed ethical framework behind such goods.

Beyond the class-status implications of PSE production and consumption, the way proponents attempted to become a part of the PSE had implications for how they also embodied their position as government functionaries. It helped them create a bureaucratic identity that stood apart from traditional portrayals of Weberian detachment. This identity did not deny that bureaucrats could be detached or disinterested. It was in large part founded in opposition to such nameless passionless bureaucrats. Instead, it was a style of bureaucracy that actively embraced attachment and affect. One had to live the PSE in order to better promote it.

This has implications beyond Ecuador. The need for PSE proponents, especially IEPS staff, to engage in a style of bureaucracy that embraced affective connections was in large part due to the precarity of the institute itself. As discussed in more depth in Chapter Four, the IEPS was in a constantly precarious political position, whereby it would be difficult for any president to simply erase the institute, but nor was any president required to secure funding beyond the bare-minimum staffing costs. There are undoubtedly situations in which bureaucracy represents the gaze of the state that, as per Scott (2005), attempts to fix information in place and make citizens legible. During those times, bureaucracy can absolutely be viewed as a form of structural violence (Gupta 2012) or even “structural stupidity” (Graeber 2015).

Recent literature has highlighted, however, that there are many circumstances under which government functionaries instead have to embrace emotions and passions as a way of fulfilling their work (Ansell 2014; Cooper 2019; Cowan 2020; Nading 2017). For many in the IEPS, the experiences and feelings of the PSE were essential to their labour. This represents a reversal to analyses in which the perspectives of those interacting with bureaucracies are necessarily bent to fit those of the

bureaucracy itself (Herzfeld 1993; Hoag 2014; Graeber 2018, 2015; Gupta 2012). To be clear, this does not disprove such portrayals. Instead, it highlights the diversity of channels through which bureaucracies, particularly state institutions, can act. Rather than always assuming the disciplining power of bureaucracy, the effort IEPS staff put into cultivating the right affective attachment to the PSE highlights different ways bureaucrats can carry out their work—especially through attempts to shape ethical frameworks. The diversity of available strategies to bureaucrats highlights their importance in the policy process. Rather than disinterested agents of policy, the understandings frontline bureaucrats have, not only of policy but of wider social values, deeply inflects their realisation of policy. At the same time, their enactment of policy, combined with their own consumption habits and entrepreneurial practices, also worked to reshape markers of middle-class ethics and status. To this end, the next chapter examines how the social values of IEPS staff inflected both their realisation of policy and their entrepreneurialism, while the latter also had an impact on their understanding of the PSE itself.

FOUR

Slow Collective Effervescence

The man to my left answered his phone almost the moment the second panel began. This was day two of the conference first mentioned in Chapter One, organised by the Consortium of Autonomous Provincial Governments of Ecuador on the topic of provincial government and the PSE. The topics ranged from organic foodstuffs to the need for less red tape in organising solidarity fairs. There was even a call for the audience to re-enamour their public sector colleagues with the PSE—a clear indication of the passions that were thought to be both necessary for the construction of an alternative economy and how there was a widespread perception that they were lacking. Even once the man next to me had finished with the call, he continued to disregard the speakers and slouch in his chair. His demeanour changed briefly when he suddenly sat up and looked toward the presenter intently—he passed the young woman next to him his phone and asked her to take a picture of him studiously watching. Once taken, he settled back down into his seat, the same posture as before.

Presentation after presentation appeared to be excellent examples of what authors describe as economic performativity—how the act of describing economic phenomena help bring them into being (e.g., Appel 2017; Callon 2007; Holmes 2014; MacKenzie 2006)—and yet many in the audience failed to pay attention. Quiet hubbub filled the room and people frequently glanced at their phones. How then, can we understand this economic performativity if many in the audience were not paying

attention to the performance? And how does this apparent disinterest fit in with the desired passions of the previous chapter?

My answer is that it helped forge a collective identity that, in turn, formed the basis of a style of bureaucracy I call ‘articulation’. Before exploring this in more depth, I first examine the financial situation of the IEPS, which formed the background to many of the IEPS’s troubles. Due to a political and legislative deadlock, the IEPS was left in the precarious position in which it could not be dissolved, but nor was the government forced to fund any more than the bare necessities. Next, I turn to another event in which the disinterest from many in the audience was almost palpable. I do not focus on the content of the presentations, as many around me appeared to pay it little heed. Instead, I pay attention to how it helped forge a collective identity. I argue this happened not through the high emotion of Durkheimian collective effervescence, but rather that the relative disinterest from many in the audience worked toward the “professional coordination of affect” (Mazzarella 2009, 298)—essentially, slow collective effervescence. At least some affective attachment was generated for the project at hand, but not too much.

In the final section, I examine the concept of ‘articulation’ as it was used by my interlocutors. As a style of bureaucracy, it was focused on cooperation with other organisations while, at the same time, being very inward focused on the individual. In doing so, I highlight how the IEPS worked through a different strategy to normal depictions of bureaucracy as “the iron cage” (Weber 2013) or a way to outsource affective labour onto others (Graeber 2015). Instead, I join other scholars examining bureaucrats, often under circumstances of limited state capacity, in how they often take affective labour onto themselves in order to coordinate with others (e.g., Ansell 2014; Nading 2017; Street 2012).

Finances

A key background to the affective dimensions of PSE events, especially those organised by the IEPS, were the financial difficulties the institute faced during my fieldwork. Since the crash in the price of oil in 2014, the Ecuadorian government had faced financial difficulties as the resource rents generated by oil and gas extraction were undercut, leaving massive holes in the state budget. While this chapter primarily deals with the affective dimensions of the IEPS's work, the finances of the institute form an important backdrop to the collective identity the IEPS attempted to cultivate. Structures of feeling, as the collective experience of emotion at a particular time, are deeply bound to their context (Filmer 2003; Williams 1965, 1977). This section therefore examines the financial situation of the IEPS—how it was both shielded from being dissolved but also had no claims to funding beyond the minimum necessary to pay staff. I show how, despite staff taking a critical position on the austerity that placed a strong downward pressure on the IEPS budget, due to the precarity of the IEPS's financial position, the institute as a whole still turned toward affective strategies of collective identity formation.

Anthropologists have documented how policy reform, especially relating to state finances and the financial system, has often been promoted alongside an imminent and yet eternal sense of crisis (Bear 2015; Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010; Janet 2013). In her study of the effects of austerity politics on public sector institutions on the Hooghly River in Kolkata, Bear (2015, 50) notes that the ethical dimensions of austerity politics are often hidden behind the construction of state debt as an objective number necessitating a narrow technical solution. She notes that public deficits have an “amnesiac power” to obscure questions about how the actions of a few key decision-makers to accrue debt become a collective responsibility for repayment on behalf of the entire nation.

In comparison, perhaps because of their work in and around alternative economics, many of my interlocutors did question the fundamentals of Ecuador's supposed public debt. While my

interlocutors often disagreed as to the underlying causes of Ecuador's budget problems, almost all pointed to the crash in the price of oil in 2014. Most of my interlocutors said that they believed Correa had hoped the dip in the price of oil would be temporary. He continued to make big expenditures, covered with international loans, hoping for a relatively swift restoration of the price of oil, similar to that which occurred after the crash of 2008. With hindsight, they said it was a gamble that did not pay off. Many also traced the origins to Correa's refusal to create a sovereign wealth fund—a reserve for precisely that sort of emergency.⁶⁵ In both these readings, the national debt was the result of decisions made by one man. Others thought the issue was dollarisation in 2000. This was a particularly sore point for some, as many middle-class Ecuadorians felt they had lost a lot of money held in bank accounts because the forced exchange rate between the Sucre and US dollar was especially low. On the other hand, some thought dollarisation was one of the few things stopping Ecuador from sharing the economic fate of Venezuela. A few, admittedly a very small minority, even thought the national debt was simply not as extreme as the government was claiming, and that the alarmist discourse was a strategy by Moreno to discredit the previous administration. The fundamentals of Ecuador's debt and austerity were widely critiqued but not from a shared vantage point.

In the face of this lack of consensus, most of these critical stances faded into the background. Instead, those working in and around the PSE turned their attention to inter-institutional politics. During my time in Ecuador, the Moreno government was not running unmitigated austerity budgets. There was still funding for social services, albeit the central state was attempting to make savings.

⁶⁵ It is worth noting that during my fieldwork, the price of oil was trending upwards once more, creating the impression that if only the government had been able to avoid two to three years generating significant debt, they would have been able to weather the storm. The price of oil crashed again, albeit not so dramatically, at the end of the year.

Consequently, while staff did not think that the central government thought of the IEPS as political opposition, they did feel undervalued by the administration. Although the PSE was often mentioned in Moreno's speeches and press-releases relating to his plans to "reactivate the economy", most PSE proponents thought this was largely just talk and that the bulk of government support went to the mainstream economy. The Ministry of Industry and Productivity—especially the departments that assisted small business—was singled out as a recipient of support that rightfully should have gone to the IEPS. In essence, although PSE supporters from many diverse groups identified the origins of the current deficit as stemming from different political and economic choices, with minimal influence over those decisions, they tended to instead focus on contemporary inter-institutional politics. The IEPS and other PSE-related institutions had to secure resources through inter-institutional alliances.

This need for support from other organisations, both inside and outside government, helps explain the disruption and dismay caused by the double move into and out of the office of the vice-president. The reason for moving the IEPS out from the Ministry for Social and Economic Inclusion to sit under the vice-president was never explicitly stated. Some of my interlocutors speculated that the vice-president was preparing for a run at the presidency in the next election and that the IEPS might form one potential avenue by which she could appeal to voters—especially if the institute were able to run programs that provided material benefits to the public. Based on this, some staff hoped that the move might involve further resourcing for the IEPS. At the very least, many thought the IEPS might gain some authority by being moved under the vice-president's umbrella. Within a few months, however, Vice-President Vicuña had resigned in the face of corruption allegations, and the IEPS was moved back to its original institutional place within the Ministry.

When viewed from a narrow focus on the policy impacts of the move, the disruption did not seem to be significantly larger than earlier, turbulent politics of the IEPS—no projects or programs

that I was aware of either specifically started while the institute was under the vice-president, nor were any ended. Physically, no staff even moved desk. On an affective level, however, the whole affair appeared to be quite dismaying for IEPS staff. Initially, many people, not just in the IEPS but in related organisations, were excited by the move. There was some wariness of further disruption; however, several contacts told me that they thought it represented the PSE being taken seriously by the national government. These hopes help explain why Vicuña's resignation and the subsequent move back under the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion proved extra frustrating and dismaying for the IEPS and allied organisations—a brief prospect for a change in fortune for the institute was dashed.

The aborted institutional move of the IEPS was an important event during my fieldwork. However, although the scale of the potential authority and resources available to the IEPS was far larger than any other institutional alliances courted by the institute, in many ways it was just an extension of the labour IEPS staff already undertook. Because the institute did not have access to economic or political resources, it was left in an ambivalent position. While the PSE was first legislated in the 2008 Constitution, the IEPS was created with the subsequent Organic Law of the Popular Solidarity Economy. A key consequence of this, unusual in a political system with an extremely strong executive, was that the IEPS could not be dissolved without an act of the National Assembly. Similarly, the institute had to be guaranteed the funding to pay salaries, office space, and sundries; however, there was no obligation to for any further funding for projects, travel expenses, etc.⁶⁶

The IEPS could not be made a total victim of fiscal austerity, but nor did the institute have the sway for funding to run programs that required anything more than staffing expenses. Occasional day

⁶⁶ For a breakdown of the IEPS budget over the period of 2013–2019, which does an excellent job of tracing the fluctuations in major programs and spending categories, see: Villalba-Eguiluz et al. (2020, 7–8).

trips could be funded with careful records of petrol expenditure, approved by management, but there was little leeway for working outside of regular office hours. Other expenses, such as money or materials to help producers, were simply unavailable. With some towns and cities in Pichincha being three to four hours' drive from the IEPS office, the ability of staff to visit was extremely limited, with no capacity to visit outside of office hours—creating great difficulties coordinating with other actors. Even when IEPS staff could meet with potential PSE producers, they generally had no financial or material support to offer. To be able to provide any help, the IEPS was dependent on other institutional alliances.

The sense of permanent precarity is perhaps exemplified by the comments of my interlocutors since the election of Guillermo Lasso in 2021. While Lasso himself is firmly from the right side of politics and favours privatisation and economic liberalisation, the National Assembly is dominated by a variety of left-wing parties. Chatting to Matilde over WhatsApp, one of the few long-term IEPS staff members, I asked how the institute was going, especially with a right-wing president in power.

“It’s the same as always,” she replied. “They can’t get rid of us without the Assembly. So, they pay us just enough to operate and pretend we don’t exist.”

The situation of the IEPS shows how the logics of “austerity politics” can perpetuate even in situations where, unlike in the fieldsite of Bear (2015), the fundamental assumptions of the causes of indebtedness are not shared. Unlike the bureaucrats studied by Bear, my interlocutors did not explain Ecuador’s debt and deficit (and the lack of financial support for the IEPS in particular) through union activism, low labour productivity, or anything else that could be resolved by the private market itself. Proponents often saw entrepreneurial strategies as necessary to the success of the PSE, but they did not see established entrepreneurs, or their ventures, as essential. PSE enterprises were encouraged to seek customers in the private market, but private businesses themselves were viewed with wariness.

The Correa administration, which created the IEPS, was not a neoliberal government. Similarly, while the election of Moreno represented a shift in economic policy away from Correa's "Twenty-first Century Socialism", his administration's politics, especially in 2018, did not represent the widescale privatisation of services or withdrawal of the state that is associated with neoliberal politics.⁶⁷ The discourse surrounding both the IEPS and the PSE was not reflective of a valorisation of neoliberal values such as austerity or freedom (cf. Bear and Mathur 2015). Even so, the IEPS was left without resources to run projects and programs.

One important result of this shortage was the turn toward entrepreneurial economic logics discussed in chapters one and three. The other, examined here, was a need to find resources elsewhere. Whether it was the volunteer labour of university academics to lecture for free, loans for PSE enterprises sourced from credit associations, procurement orders from other government departments, or even financial support from NGOs and international development agencies, for the IEPS to do anything more than just exist, it needed support from other organisations. This was why the saga around the vice-president was so disheartening. The IEPS not only lacked financial resources, it also lacked the political or legal authority to insist on cooperation. Consequently, without money or sway, the IEPS needed to convince other organisations to cooperate. Events such as the conference described in the introduction served to help the IEPS convince others to join the PSE as a political project by forging a sense of collective identity around the alternative economy. Before discussing this

⁶⁷ Due to later political manoeuvrings, such as seeking IMF loans and consequent attempts at economic restructuring, many political commentators now consider Moreno to have been a right-wing president. It is worth noting that during the time of my fieldwork, these actions were not on the horizon and Moreno was still generally considered a centre or centre-left president more focused on disrupting Correa's legacy than any other political ambitions.

collective identity, however, I examine the anthropological literature on meetings in order to grasp the affective dimensions of the event. I then put it in conversation with works on economic performativity to show how economy can be performed, even if many in the audience were not paying attention to the content of presentations.

Collective Identity

The event that forms the bulk of my analysis in this chapter was described as a *conversatorio*. Although often translated into English as “conversation” or “dialogue”, among government and academic institutions in Ecuador, it tended to refer to a style of event in which people gave presentations to an audience who then commented on them. The word *conversatorio* implied conversation and gave the sense that discussion from the audience was as important as the presentations of speakers. At some events, there was back-and-forth dialogue. This particular *conversatorio*, like most I attended in Ecuador, offered little opportunity for the audience to talk with presenters. Just a series of written questions after each speaker.

In this section, I examine the specific form of the *conversatorio*, showing how it was both similar to and different from anthropological conceptions of meetings. I use this to show how, despite not being especially ‘effervescent’, the atmosphere of the room contributed to a sense of collective identity around the promotion of the PSE. This builds on the financial precarity described in the previous section and leads to the final section in which I describe ‘articulation’—the style of bureaucracy created by this confluence of factors.

The *conversatorio* was being held in one of the newest government buildings in Quito, in a multi-purpose room without any natural light. Close to a hundred seats had been brought in for the audience; however, being temporary, they, along with the speaking podium, were not raised. Even when the

speakers stood up, anyone not in the first few rows could hardly see them. The first presenter, the then-director of the IEPS, introduced the topic for the day; this was a one-day conference on the establishment of a satellite account for the PSE—a statistical tool designed to measure the contribution of the PSE to the national economy. The director emphasised that the day was not for presenting finished conclusions, but to brainstorm ideas on how a satellite account might operate. People paid attention to her, sitting up and leaning left and right to try and see. For a little while, all eyes were up front.

This changed for Jorge, the second presenter. After a brief introduction, he began by saying that he was going to speak about the importance of a satellite account for the PSE. Before he could do that, however, he needed to talk about macro-, micro-, mesa-, and meta-economics, which he proceeded to define in depth. After a brief discussion of the different ways of measuring national accounts, he then proceeded to describe different institutional sectors (education, tourism, finance, etc.) and their contribution to the economy. These were accompanied by graphs and statistics to elaborate their contribution, flashing by quickly on the screen.

There was a moment when the two young women sitting next to me leant over and whispered a little, trying to puzzle out some of the details of what he was saying. For the most part, however, the quiet talk around me appeared to mostly be general office chatter and gossip. Jorge rounded out his presentation with a brief rundown of what was statistically known about the PSE currently from the officially registered associations. These again flashed up on the screen as tables as he ran quickly through them, too fast to take notes.

At first glance, the *conversatorio* could fit within anthropological conceptions of a meeting—defined by Schwartzman (1989, 7) as a communicative event involving people “[assembled] for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group” and having a clear set of

rules around who could and could not speak. People were assembled to discuss a topic relating to the functioning of the IEPS, and who could speak and when was evident to all present. On one level, this was a space for the communication of information and perhaps a place for dialogue. This was certainly how the event had been billed to attendees, although it was not exactly what occurred in practice.

Toward the end of each presentation, little slips of paper were passed around the room to write down questions. During Jorge's talk, one was passed to me. Sitting next to me was one of my regular contacts from the IEPS and a friend of hers. They leant over toward me and half-jokingly asked if I could write down "Is there or isn't there a satellite account for the PSE?" This was halfway through the *conversatorio*, explicitly billed as being about the formation of a satellite account for the PSE, and those sitting next to me, after being bombarded with statistics and methodologies, still had not been able to decipher if this account already existed. My friend was undertaking a master's degree in the PSE, and her work involved educating other IEPS staff in its theoretical principles. She was not simply a disengaged bureaucrat but had a personal interest in the PSE. If this were a communicative event, it did not appear to involve successful communication for a large part of the audience, including many of those passionate about the PSE.

Similarly, while meetings have also been treated in the anthropological literature as assisting in the functioning of an organisation, it is difficult to see how the *conversatorio* served this purpose. Those little slips of paper, passed around toward the end of each panel, were the only space for discussion. This *conversatorio* therefore cannot not be treated as a space in which a decision was reached by either consensus or majority voting (Bailey 2004). Equally, with little room for all to speak, it lacked the "capacity to legitimate" (Morton 2014, 733)—it could not "turn an utterance into a decision" (Morton 2014, 736). Finally, there was even little space for developing social relationships—after the presentations there was a little chatter, but people mostly went swiftly to lunch, not in large groups,

but just the twos and threes they would normally lunch with. This ruled out even the informal productivity that can occur around meetings, rather than during them (Abram 2017). If this event helped with the operation of the IEPS, it must have done so through more indirect means.

In a similar vein, the conference at first appeared a very literal example of economic performativity. As discussed in Chapter One, this is an approach to economics made famous by Callon (2007) that borrows the concept of ‘performativity’ from Austin (1962) and Butler (1990). Economic performativity examines how the act of describing economies brings them into being. Jorge, down the front of the audience and moving through numerous PowerPoint slides covered with tables and pie charts, was making statements describing the economy, statements that also performed the role of bringing the PSE into being (Holmes 2014; MacKenzie 2006). As highlighted by Holmes (2014, 23), charts, tables, and graphs not only describe an economy, “these representational practices are also constitutive ... they are vital to creating the economy as an empirical fact”. The conference was not simply about presenting ideas around the PSE and measurement but helping to make a world in which those facts succeeded (Callon 2007).

Many did not pay attention, however. By the end of the first presentation, the breath of a hundred people was making the room uncomfortably warm. From the first, people had slowly, in ones and twos, taken out their phones and begun to idly browse WhatsApp, leaning back in their chairs. This accelerated from Jorge’s presentation. Green and white messages, mostly pictures and bits of text, began to flow under thumbs throughout the room. Many attendees, like the two young women to my right, chatted with each other in quiet voices. Yawns emerged, becoming audible and uncovered. At times, people’s attention would return. The last speaker got up and talked with a bit more emotion. But soon eyes drifted back down to the mobile phone in hand. Once brought out, I never saw a phone put away again. A man in front of me looked up and down between the speakers and his phone. Each

time, he rocked his chair ever so slightly, edging it slowly backward. Each minute shuffle backward marked a loss of focus from whoever was speaking. By the second or third speaker, the chair had slid so far back it was touching the knees of the person behind.

Through the glass wall, I could see a small tea stand set up just outside in the corridor. Those near the edges of the audience regularly got up to make themselves a tea or coffee before returning to the room. When they got back, they were refreshed enough to pay attention to the presentation for a minute or two but soon found themselves drawn back into the world of their phones. A few even seemingly disappeared as the morning wore on. I did not see anyone leaving, but the edges of the audience became slightly tattered as chairs were left empty. Many people were clearly losing focus, not everyone but at least half.

Graeber (2015) has noted there's a tendency in anthropology to turn away from the boring aspects of bureaucracy, as it feels as if there's not much to say about those features we ourselves struggle to pay attention to. They appear meaningless. Anthropologists, sociologists, and even philosophers agree that meaninglessness is at the heart of boredom,⁶⁸ or meaning is the reason for its absence in situations where it might otherwise be expected (Eräsaari 2017).⁶⁹ The expressions of boredom on those around me—idly scrolling on phones, yawns, chatter, constantly getting up to have cups of tea—hint at many in the audience failing take in any meaning from the *conversatorio*.

⁶⁸ See: Barbalet (1999); Jervis, Spicer, and Manson (2003); Musharbash (2007); and Svendsen (2005).

⁶⁹ Philosophers and some anthropologists distinguish between situative boredom and existential boredom, with the former being transient and the latter enduring (Musharbash, 2007; Svendsen, 2005). The type of boredom I describe here would be considered to be situative. This distinction, however, has little impact on my argument.

That very state of relative meaninglessness, however, and how it was collectively shared helped forge a collective identity around the PSE. Many in the audience may have been struggling to pay attention through a difficult presentation, but they were struggling together. The emotion in the room may not have been high Durkheimian collective effervescence, but it was largely shared—a slow collective effervescence. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim argues that collective identity is forged through the removal of people from their everyday lives and spending time together in shared states of heightened emotion—famously referred to as “collective effervescence”. Those synchronised actions that serve “to strengthen the bonds attaching the believer to his god ... really strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member” (Durkheim 2012, 206). This has continued to the present for, “as Durkheim sensed, collective rituals and gatherings suggest that you are participating in something bigger than you” (Jasper 1997, 194). Even when not explicitly referencing Durkheim, analyses of political identity formation tend to focus on those moments of high emotional impact. Lazar (2018), for example, describes how the singing of a Peronist anthem captured the sense of kinship in an Argentine labour union. In Australia, Lea (2008, 84) describes how, when someone misspeaks at a government workshop, the existing order of a bureaucracy can be upheld in “an exquisite if momentary agony of heightened self-consciousness”.

Despite the utopian conception of economics that the PSE represented and the solidarity that its proponents championed, as many IEPS staff and related departments as possible were drawn into a room in the basement of a government building to sit through consecutive presentations on the topic of a statistical accounting tool. In many ways, the event could not have been further from the affective attachment to the PSE described in the previous chapter—the entrepreneurial need to work in something you have a passion for. Instead, the *conversatorio* had a different effect on the affective dimensions of the PSE—moderating the passions around the alternative economy, meaning no one

became too dogmatic. People were still removed from their regular work routines to experience a shared emotional state, it was just not the high passions often associated with collective effervescence. An emotional state was shared collectively—fidgeting, phone-scrolling, and quiet chatter were on display throughout the room. Those present were clearly not finding much meaning in the concept of a satellite account, but they were failing to find it together. Passion and effervescence are not the only emotions that can be experienced collectively; there is nothing stopping more mundane emotions being experienced as a group.

Producing slow collective effervescence took work—speakers had to be organised, the room booked, chairs brought in, and people driven in from other provinces within a half day’s drive. It is not that, as per Braverman (1974), monotony is simply a by-product of modernity; instead, “monotony is being actively made” (Blanchette 2019, 62). The organisers of the event may not have set out to instil a sense of boredom in great swaths of the audience, but it was still the broad outcome. And while that particular conference, with the flat seating and lack of fresh air and sunlight, may have been an extreme example of an event that lent itself to detachment, there were sighs, WhatsApp messages, and quiet chatter at many events I attended that were run by the IEPS and related organisations. Other meetings, generally those that were smaller and more interactive, often had people showing fewer signs of boredom. Though even in a meeting with as few as four people I have seen someone sitting aside, clearly browsing their phone or just looking entirely disinterested in proceedings. Communicating or performing meaningful economic concepts to all the audience present was clearly not the primary purpose of such events.

The presentations could be seen as serving labour discipline where “bullshit jobs” or the “bullshitization of jobs”, to borrow Graeber’s (2018) words, work to maintain the power and influence of financial capital. What this misses, however, is that, as an affective state, boredom can be productive.

It can help establish collective identities that are essential to the functioning of a bureaucracy. After all, “any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective” (Mazzarella 2009, 299). The IEPS was front and centre of such a social project—the PSE—and had no capacity to institute it through force. Instead, it had to resort to a style of bureaucracy I describe as ‘articulation’.

Articulation

The term ‘articulation’ I borrow from my interlocutors in Ecuador. At nearly every event I attended, both large and small, there would be a call for greater articulation. It was often expressed either as “We need more articulation” (*Necesitamos más articulación*) or “We need to articulate more” (*Necesitamos articularnos más*). Sometimes this was with a specific group or organisation and sometimes it was simply a general call. Its use was similar to the call for greater coordination found in many other bureaucracies (Lea 2008). Among my contacts, however, articulation did not simply refer to more meetings or more emails (though it often entailed that). Similar to the networking observed by Bear (2015) among her interlocutors, articulation involved an endless accumulation of ties in the hopes that they might, one day in the future, provide an opportunity. In a situation of constant precarity—where resources were always scarce—maintaining a wide variety of personal relationships, especially as people moved between organisations, was important to the function of the IEPS.

Articulation was not just networking, however. Instead, it described a way of working together that conceived of individual components interacting seamlessly, while still carrying out their functions, rather than an emphasis on a large, unified collective working toward a shared goal. Personal connections were central to articulation; however, its focus was on the work done together rather than the relationship itself. Similar to the government functionaries studied by Ansell (2014) and Nading

(2017), IEPS staff attempted to carry out their work through generating a sense of shared purpose between themselves and other relevant stakeholders, especially those with financial resources.

Because the IEPS was limited in the incentives it could offer, articulation often shifted emphasis to the internal—IEPS staff and others in the network having the ‘right’ perspective to successfully articulate with others. At another conference, in his closing remarks, the director of the local IEPS team called for greater articulation, comparing it to producing a car—“the product of many different alliances”. Importantly, in order to achieve this, according to the director, we had to leave our *egoísmo* behind. Often translated as ‘selfishness’, in this context *egoísmo* did not refer to personal benefit. Instead, he was telling us not to get too stuck in doing things in our own way. It could have been translated very loosely as ‘obstinance’—notably, the opposite of entrepreneurial flexibility. The way to achieve articulation was through an internal realignment—leaving our obstinance behind.

Zooming out, the push to adopt a satellite account, or any other form of accounting of the monetary value of the PSE, could be seen as the IEPS leaving their *egoísmo* behind—a large-scale act of articulation. Speaking to one of my contacts in 2015 about a program that involved the government purchasing school furniture from the PSE, I asked whether he thought the final cost of the program was higher than if the government had simply gone out to tender in the private market. My friend in the IEPS didn’t think so but, “more importantly,” he said, “it doesn’t matter.” Instead, he said that the wider societal benefits—dignified work and security for the artisans, the ability to afford education and medical care for their children, a sense of self-esteem from producing furniture that their own children used—far outweighed any monetary costs. These observations match with those of Nelms (personal communication), who conducted research very close to the initial legislation of the PSE. He reported

that those he spoke to in both academia and the public service were firmly against creating an econometric measure of the PSE.⁷⁰

In comparison, by 2018, the attempt to create a satellite account represented the felt need to count the alternative economy in dollars. Circumstances had changed, and IEPS staff felt the position of the institute was more precarious. To articulate with the rest of government and the economy, the IEPS and other organisations promoting the PSE had to operate on their terms. Just as, for a national economy, GDP can be considered “both a proud mark of sovereignty and a claim on sovereign interdependency” (Appel 2017, 299), the satellite account was supposed to carve out a place for the PSE alongside other economies and highlight their intertwined nature. Importantly, it was an attempt to do so in the terms and language of the rest of the economy. Rather than asking those working in other government departments and sectors of the economy to account for PSE values, such as solidarity, cooperation, and reciprocity, the satellite account proposal represented an acknowledgement that the PSE had to be valued in US dollars.⁷¹

At the same time, unlike in other examinations of economic performativity, it was not the accounting itself that mattered (Callon 2007; Holmes 2014; MacKenzie 2006). In fact, the minutiae of

⁷⁰ Here ‘econometric’ refers to any sort of measurement based in more traditional economic concepts, such as GDP growth, household consumption, etc. PSE proponents were not entirely against quantitative measurements, though they did often eschew them. Instead, proponents, especially those identified more with the anti-capitalist politics of the PSE, tended to emphasise the need for new ways to measure the alternative economy. A consensus was never reached on how this ought to be done, however.

⁷¹ For a discussion of the importance of creating other measurements in order to create an alternative economy, see Gibson-Graham (2008).

the presentations did not matter for most of those in the room, nor was their input required. For my contact and her friend sitting next to me, for instance, it did not matter whether or not there already was a satellite account of the PSE. It would have in no way impacted their work. Instead, what was important was its possibility and that it was being contemplated. If the intention of the event was to arrive at a decision (Bailey 2004), or the legitimisation of an existing decision through discussion (Morton 2014), the IEPS had a host of other event styles that leant themselves to greater participation. The *mesa de reflexión* that I discuss in the next chapter served this purpose well, for example. Instead, the *conversatorio* signalled to the audience the broad sense that the PSE was to be integrated and valued in the same terms as the rest of the economy.

The need for staff to leave their *egoísmo* behind, to consider the PSE in the terms of other government departments and the wider economy, meant the IEPS operated through a style of bureaucracy that cut against common depictions of ever greater routinisation. Rather than Graeber's (2015, 75) vision of bureaucracy "ignoring all the subtleties of real social existence and reducing everything to preconceived mechanical or statistical formulae", "real social existence" was essential to the functioning of the institute. Boredom may not be the sort of romantic collective experience commonly studied by anthropologists, but that makes it no less productive. Instead of the reductionist gaze of the state that attempts to render its subject legible (Scott 2005), institutions like the IEPS—those formed around extremely mutable concepts and with restricted access to money or authority—need to articulate. They need to be seen in order to enter into relationships with others (Street 2012); however, they need to be seen as amenable to the objectives of other institutions. Under such circumstances, rather than bureaucracy pushing the labour of interpreting concepts such as the PSE onto others (Graeber 2015), the IEPS operated through a process of articulation, which involved the opposite—taking unto itself the labour of interpreting its vision into a form that could fit within that

of other actors. Just as how during a time of precarity the PSE had to be expressed in the terms of the rest of the economy, the IEPS had to express its vision in the terms of the rest of the government and other well-resourced local actors.

Articulation represents a form of collectivity that needs to be actively constructed. In comparison to other affective styles of bureaucracy that are more spontaneous or natural (Lazar 2012), articulation requires a shared broad vision, but one that is not too dogmatic. Those IEPS staff, such as those in the previous chapter, who had constructed themselves as having the right mentality and being deeply engaged with the PSE, still had to moderate their passions. Similar to Lea's (2008, esp. 30–33) “ironic talk”, IEPS bureaucrats had to be in a position of both being willing to work toward the broadly held vision of the PSE, while also being able to be somewhat detached from more purist notions. This was necessary to articulate with other institutions that were more sceptical of such an ideological alternative (the Ministry of Industry and Productivity, for example). Events such as the *conversatorio* helped construct such an identity. They worked toward a “professional coordination of affect” (Mazzarella 2009)—Durkheimian effervescence extremely slowed down—that was a central principal of institutional survival during a period of extreme precarity.

Conclusion

As highlighted by Bear (2015), the political situations often ascribed to be the triggers of austerity politics in popular discourse often obscure the web of political decisions that were made beforehand. However, as highlighted here, even when government functionaries have a critical view on the plight of their institution, they can often still find themselves adopting the logics of the very austerity politics that they themselves oppose. For the IEPS, this was in large part due to the precarious position of the institute, both politically and financially. Without the money to directly fund much of their work or

the political authority to push the issue of cooperation, the institute had to convince other organisations to supply resources in order to run projects. Lacking both the carrot and the stick, the strategy of ‘articulation’ became particularly important to the IEPS, though it was also discussed in other organisations.

Here I have used the term ‘articulation’, borrowed from my interlocutors, to describe a strategy pursued by IEPS staff, and others, to try and realise the PSE as a set of policies. Similar to calls for greater coordination in other bureaucracies (Lea 2008), articulation involved a focus on the need to interact with other groups and organisations. While some authors, such as Mosse (2005) and Tate (2015), may see policy as an almost entirely post-fact rationalisation of already existing action, there was still need for some coordination. Training courses were run by the IEPS, and the mobilising concept of the PSE helped determine their content. It was the concept of the PSE, diverse as it was, that helped determine eligibility for government procurement contracts. Presentations like those described were essential to the running of the institute. They helped create a sense of collective identity around the PSE, but not a dogmatic one that would risk leaving proponents unable to articulate with others. At the same time, due to the relative lack of authority on the part of the IEPS, the institute was unable to articulate with other institutions from a position of strength. As revealed in the director’s statement about avoiding *egoísmo*, the impetus was on IEPS staff to make sure their mentality fitted with other organisations.

The format of events like the *conversatorio* and conference described here assisted with generating the right level of affective commitment. Broad ideas of the PSE as a political project were communicated, such as it being counted as part of the larger Ecuadorian economy, but not too dogmatically so. As was astutely observed by Lea (2008), public servants need to cultivate a particular subjectivity—almost a form of doublethink, whereby a passion for a political project can be held while,

at the same time, the bureaucrat can be critical of that project or hold alternative visions of it so as to articulate with other institutions. Beyond pushing back against almost mechanical portrayals of bureaucracy that see institutions as outsourcing the affective labour of interpretation,⁷² such an understanding of bureaucratic activity also raises questions about the relative power of institutions.

As discussed in the next chapter, at the heart of the PSE is an act of translation—as the diverse values of the PSE have to be translated in such a way as to make them legible to potential allies. Translation is an act of power (Asad 1986; Gal 2015; Povinelli 2001). As a concept shifts between contexts, its meaning is reinterpreted by the discussants. Whose interpretation carries more weight is inherently an outcome of relative authority and power. For the IEPS, with its limited influence, due to both its lack of finances and political authority, its understanding of the values around the PSE very much had to conform to those of institutions around it. The satellite account itself was an example of this. Although there had always been attempts to quantify the PSE, even in dollar terms, its exact contribution to the wider economy was left uncounted. By 2018, many in the IEPS were feeling the pressure to make firmer measures of these figures in order to generate legitimacy in the eyes of the wider government.

The consequences of this imbalance in power extends further than the satellite account, however. A large factor in the IEPS's turn to the entrepreneurial and microenterprises was that this was the language the rest of the government and other development organisations were speaking. Articulation, with its twin focus on coordination with other organisations but also one's own perspective in relation to them, focuses our attention on how bureaucracies are shaped by their

⁷² See, for example: Graeber (2015), Gupta (2012), and Scott (2005).

circumstances and their relationship to other institutions. With the IEPS experiencing precarity on numerous levels, entrepreneurialism was an appropriate language to couch its own discourse in. Firstly, it allowed them to more easily coordinate with many other government and non-government institutions. Beyond that, however, the language of entrepreneurialism itself with its focus flexibility, added value, and short time frames, is highly appropriate for contexts of precarity and extreme uncertainty more generally. It connected the needs of the IEPS with the discourse of many other institutions. All of this was enabled through slow collective effervescence.

Most IEPS staff I spoke to appeared to really believe in the PSE, albeit with very different conceptions thereof. As discussed in the previous chapter, they engaged in many personal projects in order to be a part of the alternative economy themselves. Nevertheless, even they could not be too dogmatic in their embodiment of the PSE. Or else, as per Patty's reluctance to formally register as part of the PSE despite being an IEPS staff member (Chapter Three), PSE proponents had to keep those aspects of their lives separate. The PSE supporter had to be kept somewhat divorced from the government functionary. By encouraging a form of collective identity that was centred on alternative values while not being dogmatic about them, slow collective effervescence created a context in which IEPS staff were able to keep the broad concept of the PSE alive while the specificities shifted to better articulate with other institutions.

FIVE

Articulating the PSE

More than twenty of us were sat in the ground floor room of the headquarters of the National Federation of Campesino, Black and Indigenous Organisations (FENOCIN). We were waiting for a *capacitación* (capacity building workshop) organised between the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS) and the Federation to begin. Aside from myself, the other participants were members of FENOCIN. Most were at the *capacitación* representing agricultural associations based in towns surrounding Quito, although two or three lived in the city itself and worked individually in small-scale manufacturing (such as making clothing). One participant was there representing her legally recognised Indigenous community roughly two hours north of Quito.

This diversity of participants stemmed from the fact that FENOCIN was an important organisation for political mobilisation in Ecuador, representing a coalition of political groups. While these included Indigenous organisations, in comparison to the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE)—the largest federation of Indigenous political organisations in Ecuador—FENOCIN placed a much greater relative emphasis on groups representing organised labour. They were active during the political upheavals of the 80s and 90s, as well as the recent protests in 2019; however, overall, they enjoyed a slightly less contentious relationship with the Correa and Moreno governments than other leftist political organisations. Their headquarters, where the *capacitación* was held, was in a large old house in the inner south of Quito. The room we were in was

large, tiled, and mostly bare, with everyone sitting on red plastic chairs. Posters portraying both Correa and Bolivia's Evo Morales—icons of Latin America's Pink Tide—were on the walls, highlighting the political leanings of the federation. Their flag also hung proudly on the opposite wall, its crossed machete and axe a clear allusion to the hammer and sickle, emphasising the group's leftist politics, while also alluding to its *campesino* roots.

The *capacitación* was a pilot for a new program organised by the IEPS, known as PSE Schools. These were going to be 40-hour courses, complete with certificates for participants, designed to support diverse groups engaged in the PSE—from enterprises to advocacy groups. The particular course I followed was a pilot program designed to help improve leadership in the PSE. The event opened with several speeches, one of them by a representative from the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion. His speech touched on typical topics for the opening of a PSE event, including how the alternative economy was somewhat unknown (among the general public, assumedly) but that the PSE was not just “a poor economy for poor people” (*no es una economía pobre para pobres*). He concluded by saying that they (the audience) would be converted into PSE actors. The course would be forty hours long, he explained, but it wouldn't end there. The organisers wanted attendees to stay in contact for further *capacitaciones* or technical improvements (*mejores técnicos*). He hoped they would continue to the end of the course and beyond.

Clearly, a large part of the purpose of the training session was not only communicating the contents of the workshops, but the very fact of bringing everyone together into a self-identifying constituency. The *capacitación* itself was officially under the auspices of the IEPS. At the time, the IEPS had just been moved from the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion to the Office of the vice-president; however, the ministry had played an essential role in developing the PSE schools. Creating

a network of different groups around the PSE was of great importance to all the government organisations involved in preparing the *capacitación*.

In comparison to the conference from the previous chapter, however, the workshop generated much more engagement. The director and all subsequent trainers across the entire programme spoke with much more passion and drew forth much more interaction from participants. Rather than being dedicated to the careful management of slow bureaucratic collective effervescence, the *capacitación* was about generating more passionate collective attachment to the PSE. The forty hours were spread across six sessions, every Wednesday for six weeks, including a final *pambamesa* (a Kichwa term for a social event similar to a bring-a-plate party) to celebrate our graduation. It represented many hours of labour from the IEPS and volunteer presenters and took a lot of time out of the lives of participants. Well-regarded university professors were brought in to give talks, as well as an ex-assemblyman. These were no small achievements on the part of IEPS organisers.

At the same time, the direct value of the training session was not clear. As discussed in the next section, added value (*valor agregado*) was an important mobilising factor for the IEPS. They sought it in the products of PSE producers and even in their own work. The *capacitación* at FENOCIN, however, was designed to help with the capacity building of potential PSE leaders and covered diverse topics such as “the current political-economic situation”, “rights”, “local development”, “participation”, and “democracy”. The content of these courses also tended toward the abstract, with the lecture on democracy, for instance, starting with the ancient Babylonians and coming to the present political situation of Ecuador. These were generally not specific skills or techniques for political organising, nor did the *capacitación* deal with topics that might raise the monetary value of PSE products. Other training sessions were oriented more toward specific skills (such as one on cookery by a professional chef), but

most that I participated in stuck to more abstract themes. In this chapter, I therefore ask where the *valor agregado* was for the IEPS in these *capacitaciones*.

In answering this question, I engage with anthropological theories of labour, particularly those related to bureaucrats. In essence, I highlight an alternate form of bureaucratic labour to the highly structured forms of work emphasised in many depictions of bureaucracy (Graeber 2015, 2018; Gupta 2012; Herzfeld 1993). Instead, I show how many bureaucrats, especially those with access to limited resources, engage in highly affective labour in order to articulate between different groups. Similar to the previous chapter, I focus upon labour staff undertook to align perspectives. Where the previous conference worked to temper the passions of the staff of the IEPS itself, in this chapter I focus on labour undertaken to try and inspire more passion in others, with a particular focus on PSE producers. During this process, as the IEPS mediated between different sets of economic logics, the social values of the PSE were changed in the process. What was once considered a program for redistribution, for example, became recategorised as a source of seed funds for microentrepreneurial ventures.

In this chapter, I first examine the importance of *valor agregado* to the IEPS and a host of related organisations in PSE promotion. I demonstrate how, while it was primarily considered to be an economic concept, this did not divorce it from other social considerations such as how profits from businesses were utilised. I then discuss the work of articulation undertaken by IEPS staff. Building on the previous chapter, I examine how the IEPS interfaced between different groups and different economic logics, engaging in very similar labour to that of brokers. Finally, I conclude by examining the networks that were assembled through these processes of mediation, and how, in their work of articulation, IEPS staff worked to build a self-identifying network around the PSE. Ultimately, I argue that it was the creation of this network that was the key value the IEPS added to the PSE, through the affective labour of articulation.

Valor Agregado

IEPS staff and others working to promote the PSE used a variety of entrepreneurial concepts throughout their work. Staff regularly recommended producers seek ways to add value to their products beyond the norm or minimum. Even in their own side hustles, staff sought ways to innovate. Matilde's dried fruit, for instance, was a new product to the region and turned what had previously been a waste stream into a source of revenue. Of those entrepreneurial concepts, 'innovation' and 'valor agregado' were two of the most common and widely shared across almost all groups I spoke to. The former, as discussed in Chapter Three, received more emphasis from ConQuito, particularly in Teresa's words that innovation was not just for tech companies. In comparison, at the IEPS, valor agregado was far more commonly used. In this section, I first outline the importance of added value to the IEPS and other PSE actors. I then proceed to analyse how it was not only a monetary understanding of value but tied in with how PSE proponents understood the social values of the PSE. I argue that the value the IEPS added to the PSE was precisely this entwining of monetary and social values.

Valor agregado, while a common term used by nearly all my interlocutors, was a fundamental concept to the IEPS and how it conceived its role. Not only was adding value considered the key to success, but it was how staff generally understood their job—to add value to the PSE. This was reflected in the names of the different divisions within the institute. Officially, they were called 'directorates' (*direcciones*), with the full titles being along the lines of "Dirección de Estudio e Investigación de la EPS" (Directorate of PSE Studies and Research). However, in conversation, during presentations, and even in some promotional material, the different directorates were referred to as 'value adders' (*agregadoras de valor*). For instance, at two of my first meetings with IEPS staff, the organisational structure of the IEPS was described as consisting of four principal *agregadoras de valor*—

fortalecimiento de actores (strengthening actors), *fomento productivo* (productive development), *intercambio y mercados* (exchange and markets), and *estudios e investigación* (studies and research). These directorates were considered to be loosely procedural: first, Fortalecimiento helped actors become more ensconced in PSE theory; second, Fomento worked to improve the productive processes of PSE actors; third, Intercambio y Mercados helped PSE actors find spaces to sell their products; and finally, Estudios e Investigación had a reflexive role, learning from the experiences of the three other directorates.

The role of each directorate was conceived in terms of what value it could add to the productive process of the PSE, generally in terms of how it contributed to the success of PSE actors in the market. Some of the directorates had roles that were not directly related to marketable processes, for instance one piece of promotional material listed one of the services offered by Fortalecimiento as training individuals in the “norms, values and principles of the PSE”. However, under the same heading was the need to train people in the “parliamentary procedures, functions and responsibilities of management” as well as the other requirements of being a legal enterprise that sold goods and services. The private market was still largely the focus of *valor agregado*, however, and adding value was one of the key foundations upon which the IEPS established the need for its interventions.

Valor agregado was never a concept that could be precisely pinned down. On a few occasions, I asked IEPS staff to describe their understanding of it. Each time, they offered descriptions similar to those in neo-classical microeconomics—the contribution to a product that raises its monetary value. José, the director of Zone 9 at one point during my fieldwork, offered the example of someone making a sandwich and selling it—they took the bread, ham, and cheese and through their work created a sandwich that could be sold for more than the cost of the ingredients.

Exactly what the contribution was or how it added value was not always clear. For example, while I was in Ecuador, the IEPS was attempting to create a logo that registered organisations could

put on their products to show it was PSE. One of the common arguments for the branding from the IEPS was that it would add value to PSE products—consumers would value them more if they knew the products were PSE. Though precisely why customers would value the product more or who was adding this value was never firmly established. Common across both examples, however, was the fact that while the contributions could be diverse, the outcome was always monetary. One of the most important valences of *valor agregado* related to monetary value, albeit unquantified.

Just because *valor agregado* made good business sense, however, did not mean that it was divorced from PSE values. As highlighted by Maurer (2006), many anthropologists and sociologists dating back to at least Simmel (2004 [1900]) have often assumed that in the meeting of money and social values, the former nearly always wins out over the latter. Maurer (2005, 103) describes this as the “money as acid” hypothesis, in which money’s ability to “render the qualitative into the quantitative” is assumed to dissolve social bonds, flatten social values, or disembed social relations. A host of scholars from different disciplines, including Maurer himself, have critiqued this view, noting that money, rather than dissolving relations and meanings, tends to add complexity.⁷³ In the case of the PSE, even if *valor agregado* was oriented toward profit generation, it did not simply quantify the social values of the products on offer; instead, it was both the outcome of those values and a strategy people in PSE enterprises pursued to help realise social values.

The link between *valor agregado* and social values was best enunciated by Franklin, who had worked for Grupo Salinas for many years in different roles. Grupo Salinas was an umbrella group for a variety of organisations centred on Salinas de Guaranda, whose products were sold under the

⁷³ See also: Carruthers and Espeland (1998), Zlizer (1998), and Parry and Bloch (1989).

Salinerito brand. They included development-focused NGOs, a variety of non-profit enterprises (especially famous for cheese and chocolate), and a host of other community organisations. The entire group was dedicated to the development of Salinas and was often used as an emblematic example by the government, academics, and many others when discussing the PSE.

At the time I spoke to him, Franklin was working for an NGO that was part of Grupo Salinas. It was dedicated to providing technical advice to enterprises in the region to improve their production, both in quantity and quality. The NGO was in the final stages of administering a program, Hombro a Hombro (Arm in Arm), one of the earliest programs financed by the IEPS. It was designed to improve the whole economic chain for cheese making, from the production of milk through to its marketing in major cities. In 2018, the program was coming to a close.

During one of our conversations, I asked Franklin how he would describe the PSE to someone who had never heard the term. He said that solidarity came first—mutual support between people. Salinas had been an extremely impoverished town, and the first cheese factory had been founded by a Salesian priest to help the locals. This had been a success, and subsequent other ventures had been launched. Franklin acknowledged that through this history, the types of work undertaken by Grupo Salinas had changed. In the past the work had been heavily based in *minga* (a traditional form of collective labour) and more focused on simply generating some income for the town—finances to be administered by the community—or physically building local infrastructure. Now their focus was on improving both the quality and quantity of production. Rather than simple cheeses, Grupo Salinas was producing camembert, Swiss cheese, parmesan—very unusual and expensive products by the standards of most Ecuadorians. Rather than income for the township, they were concentrating on generating employment and avoiding emigration to the cities. In focusing on these issues, Grupo

Salinas was providing one of the few examples of what local development *was* rather than what it *wasn't*.⁷⁴

“But it still serves the same purpose to me,” explained Franklin—“Solidarity. Because you’re thinking the same thing as other people. In this case, through manufacturing, adding value to the primary materials that we have.”

This pivoted the discussion back toward solidarity while highlighting its links with *valor agregado*.

Franklin continued. “It’s good to talk about solidarity, but if I don’t have anything to give, apart from my time, we won’t get very far (*no llegamos mucho*).” He said that solidarity had also come alongside another strength for Salinas—the transformation of primary materials. Quoting the priest who had begun cheese making in Salinas, he said people shouldn’t be *bruto* (thick or stupid), they shouldn’t sell raw materials (*vender en bruto*).⁷⁵

“*Bruto* is collecting milk and delivering it to Nestlé,” he explained. “Instead of doing this, what we try to do is add value (*dar un valor agregado*).”

It was this added value, he continued, that created sources of work for those in Salinas. With this work, families in Salinas would be able to help their children with their education, access health services, and the community would continue to develop.

Franklin’s words also highlighted the importance of engaging in the right types of labour. People needed to engage in “smart” work as opposed to the “stupid” work of selling raw materials. Franklin was not enunciating a call for Grupo Salinas employees to explicitly become entrepreneurs.

⁷⁴ This contrasts with Germán’s discussion of local development in Chapter One.

⁷⁵ In Spanish, this is actually a play on words using two meanings of the word ‘bruto’ (stupid and crude/raw): “No sean brutos, no vendan en bruto” (Don’t be thick, don’t sell crude/raw).

His words did, however, fit with modern entrepreneurial conceptions of work in which the individual is a collection of skills that they bring to a business (Gershon 2016, 2014; Martin 2000).⁷⁶ It was not enough to sell one's labour—you had to somehow add value to the production process.

At the same time, they all had to be thinking similar things. As discussed in the next chapter, the importance of having the right mentality was a common refrain from those working in and around the PSE—in government, NGOs, and enterprises themselves. Here, however, I want to highlight how, for Franklin, what differentiated the work of Grupo Salinas from regular corporations was the shared perspective on the ends of their economic activity. Generating sources of work was one of the defining features of the organisation's success. These jobs, however, were created with a community focus—while they implicitly involved “smart” work, they were also more stable forms of employment to try and keep people in the community, rather than simply trying to generate more income for individuals.

“Nobody owns anything,” explained Franklin. The profits from the enterprises paid for wages and then were channelled back into the various arms of Grupo Salinas, including the NGO. The organisation's role was to provide technical assistance to the various productive enterprises of Grupo Salinas. In Franklin's account of the history of Grupo Salinas, the community had worked in *minga* to improve the infrastructure of the town and, in being of a similar mindset, early earnings from enterprises could be channelled back into the town rather than distributed as profits. This brought the entire community on board and paved the way to further success. Salinerito was the most frequently cited example of this process, but the story was repeated at the few other large-scale PSE enterprises I visited.

⁷⁶ See Chapter Three for a deeper discussion of individuals as being collections of skills and their own mini businesses within entrepreneurial frameworks.

Franklin's discussion of the importance of *valor agregado* in allowing Salinas to develop is revealing. He did not talk about the increased business generating individual wealth—the markers of success he referred to were not higher incomes or better access to consumer goods (such as computers, phones, or cars) or even enduring assets. Instead, the emphasis was on how the extra resources allowed them to keep the community together. Profits from the various arms of Grupo Salinas also could not be distributed to individuals—they had to be reinvested or spent on community projects. I return to the overlap between PSE values and entrepreneurial logics later in the chapter. Important here is that for Franklin, *valor agregado* was not simple profit motive. Avoiding emigration was a great concern in Salinas, as it was in other rural communities I visited. The enterprises of Grupo Salinas were perceived to help Salinas *be* a community in the sense of literally keeping people in the area.

Notably, Franklin's description of *valor agregado* required different understandings of the value of Salinerito products at different stages in the production and commercialisation process. Tsing (2015), in her well-known work on the matsutake mushroom trade, has highlighted the importance of “sorting” to long capitalist commodity chains. The mushrooms are sorted and sorted again at different stops along the chain—in the forests where they're collected, by wholesalers at American airports before export, and finally once more when they arrive in Japan. At each stage, new values are inscribed in the mushrooms (such as freedom or luxury), while earlier values from previous steps in the chain are erased. In doing so, the labour of sorting turns the mushrooms into an export commodity to be sold elsewhere. The mushrooms are known in different ways by different groups (picker, importer, exporter, retailer, consumer, etc.) for different qualities. Sorting is essential in allowing the mushrooms to pass along the chain. According to Tsing (2015, 128), it is a key step in “the creation of capitalist value from noncapitalist value regimes.”

In the case of Salinerito, the cheeses were actually made at over thirty different cheese ‘factories’ (*queseras*), each based in a small community. Some of these plants were tiny, consisting of essentially two rooms and taking in only a little over two hundred litres of milk daily. Some people from the community would deliver as little as ten litres, which itself could even be a collection from multiple family members. All of this was erased once the cheeses were collected by truck and stamped with the Salinerito logo—a brand known in Ecuador for quality. Although, as discussed later, as part of their attempt to add value to Salinerito products, the IEPS and Grupo Salinas did attempt to reinscribe the communities on the cheeses, albeit in ways recognisable to consumers.

Written almost concurrently with Tsing’s work, *Real Pigs* by Weiss (2016) also examines commodity chains. Rather than international exports, however. Weiss examines attempts to create an alternative market in heritage breed pork. In doing so, Weiss highlights how it is not simply that goods, as they travel along a network, need to be constantly requalified. The diverse perspectives are necessary for the network to function—it is the diversity of perspectives that adds value. In the case of the pigs studied by Weiss, the value of a pig to a butcher is predicated on its value to the consumer. If the customer did not value the pork for its taste, for example, the butcher could not value the carcass for the cuts and type of meat it contains. In turn, the breeder could not value the pig for those qualities that make it valuable for the butcher and so on.

Beyond this, Weiss reveals how the taste, tradition, and ethics of raising hogs all contribute to place-making and, consequently, the added value of the pork that consumers desire and that allows breeders and chefs to demand a higher price for their products. Similarly, while people bought Salinerito products for a wide variety of reasons, one of the most common was its association with *calidad* (quality). As discussed in Chapter Two, this is a multivalent concept marking the materiality, aesthetics, tradition, and social values attached to products. The European style cheeses, for example,

represented an international modernity to many consumers, which, as per Chapter Three, also substituted in for values of ethical consumption.

Part of the work of the IEPS, in conjunction with Grupo Salinas, was to attach this further meaning to Salinerito branded products. Part of the program *Hombro a Hombro* (Shoulder to Shoulder), which was just finishing up during my fieldwork, for example, involved renovating Salinerito brand stores and marketing campaigns. Both of these projects emphasised the origins of Salinerito products (especially their cheeses and smallgoods) and their connection to local development. Billboards emphasising that Salinerito products were made in Ecuador were placed in prominent locations around Quito. New store interiors had trendy modern designs (including milk crates hanging over the ceiling lights in a form of industrial-chic-meets-hipster styling). This included decals that took up entire walls offering tips for cheese and wine pairing and showing how Grupo Salinas was contributing to the development of local communities around Salinas. When talking to Sandra, the manager of the Quito brand stores, she said that this was a new marketing direction. In the past, they had only really emphasised the quality of their cheeses in relation to the narrower band of literal taste.

The IEPS and Grupo Salinas, through their joint program, were adding value through describing a variety of other qualities of Salinerito products—including their origin and the development of the communities where they were made. Each cheese, however, was not linked to the community it came from. Instead, the decals in the store simply listed the communities, noting the name of the town, its climate, how many families lived there, and what they produced (e.g., “cheese, nougat, handicrafts”). Similar to how Tsing (2015) describes matsutake mushrooms as ultimately exiting the commodity form to become a luxurious gift, an important part of the marketing was to reduce the commodity-like nature of the cheese. After being sorted into near anonymity between the

different plants, the promotional material in the Salinerito store attempted to reinscribe the cheeses with the sense of supporting communities that Franklin had described to me. Rather than being linked to specific communities, the cheeses were linked to the concept of community development in general. At the same time, by more typical understandings of taste (aroma, texture, flavour, etc.), Salinerito products were also of an extremely high quality. In this way, these many different aspects of the cheeses (and other Salinerito products) became entwined and added value for producers. Community development *was* quality.

Following Weiss, the value at each stage of the commodity chain, from community where the cheese is produced to the ultimate consumer, stems from an audience for whom these actions are performed. This understanding of value is built on the work of Graeber (2001) and Munn (1992). Like them, Weiss's work emphasises creative action before an audience whose opinion you care about. Beyond that, however, he emphasises that while the consumer's perception of value may be important to producers, it does not have to be directly shared. In fact, the producer's sense of value is often predicated on what they assume or predict consumers will value. As highlighted by Foster (2007), however, because this value is essentially co-created between brands and the consumers themselves, it is fundamentally precarious. Weiss describes how concepts like the local of "local food" work to stabilise tastes. However, sudden changes in taste on the part of consumers can still quickly erase any value that has recently been created. From this perspective, the IEPS was not only adding value to the PSE but helping to shore it up through *capacitaciones*, *mesas*, and other acts of *visibilización* by attempting to create an audience to whom the PSE mattered. The PSE might have been valued for different reasons by different people, but that was essential to the formation of the alternative economy. It also created the space for the IEPS operate through the work of articulation.

Articulating Value

The focus of the IEPS on consumers and sales to the private market at first appears to be somewhat paradoxical. Even by the government's own figures (IEPS n.d.), the vast majority of sales by PSE producers went to the state via public procurement programs that operated under very different sets of economic logics to the private market. I argue that the value the IEPS constructed itself as adding to the PSE was through articulation. They interfaced between a diverse array of actors, both public and private, and, in doing so, also mediated between the different economic logics they used. By operating between flexible, entrepreneurial logics and more structured, bureaucratic ones, the IEPS as a whole was constructed as a surprisingly enduring assemblage even though individual staff members came and went frequently.

As observed by Koch and James (2022), fiscal austerity and the withdrawal of the state from welfare funding has seen the rise of “advisers”. Speaking from the UK context, these are quasi-state functionaries who tend to operate at the borders between different institutions and actors both within and outside government. Sometimes directly employed by the state, sometimes employed by charities and NGOs funded through government grants and contracts, these advisers are employed often on behalf of welfare beneficiaries. Their role involves helping members of the general public interface with byzantine bureaucratic processes in order to try and receive some of the little remaining welfare funding. Forbess (2022), researching in the same context, describes this as a form of extraction, where government departments attempt to extract resources on behalf of clients from other departments. In many cases, the money then goes to the government department the adviser works for. A key example offered by Forbess is that of a staff member employed by the Ministry of Housing to help clients in arrears claim welfare payments they are entitled to in order to ultimately pay their rent to the Ministry.

At times, depending on the precise role, advisers launch legal action on behalf of clients to claim benefits they have been unrightfully denied.

Borrowing from anthropological literature on brokerage, Koch and James (2018) highlight how, in their work interfacing between different government departments, non-state actors, private individuals, and sometimes the market, advisers mediate values and logics between these domains.⁷⁷ Forbess (2022, 55) contends that the advice given “converts economic value into moral legitimacy and vice versa”. Obtaining benefits for clients helps advisers appear legitimate and trusted in the eyes of their interlocutors, while this legitimacy and trust can then be converted into economic gain for their department, either from the welfare recipient or from other government funding.

IEPS staff differ from UK advisers in several key ways, including that they tended not to deal with the most disenfranchised in Ecuadorian society and placed a much greater emphasis on articulating with the private market. Nevertheless, similar to the work of advisers, IEPS staff were operating across different domains, using their “idiosyncratic and often highly localised knowledge” (Koch and James 2022, 9). The IEPS at the time of my fieldwork was not operating amidst a declared period of public austerity. Even so, the Moreno government in 2018 was beginning to reduce expenditure. This, combined with the perceived lack of support from the rest of government, placed the institute in a similarly precarious position to many of the British government departments described above.

Through their work of articulation described in the previous chapter, IEPS staff interfaced not only between different organisations but different sets of economic logics. These logics, which I

⁷⁷ See also: Koster and van Leynseele (2018), Lindquist (2015a), Molland (2012, 2022), Mosse and Lewis (2006), and Tuckett (2015, 2018).

describe as entrepreneurial and bureaucratic, diverge strongly in their descriptions of both how an economy ought to be organised and the ethics involved. It was in allowing these logics to articulate with one another, to the benefit of registered PSE enterprises, that the IEPS as an institute carved out a precarious and yet oddly enduring existence. To understand the different logics of the PSE that the IEPS had to articulate, it is important to understand two of the largest programs through which PSE associations received work.

The overwhelming bulk of PSE purchasing came from the government in two programs—*ferias inclusivas* (inclusive fairs) and *catálogos dinámicos* (dynamic catalogues). *Ferias inclusivas* were a type of procurement program whereby, rather than going out to tender for a single large contract, the work was broken up into many small contracts, and registered entities from the PSE applied to supply some of the required goods or services. Procurement in *ferias* was generally for things that did not require extensive capital. Hilando el Desarrollo, for example, was the first and best-known *feria*. Every child at a public primary school in Ecuador receives two school uniforms and one sports uniform for free. Rather than contracting out to large suppliers, locals (often women) were encouraged to apply for some of the work. They could apply as individuals but were encouraged to form associations by being allocated proportionately more work. This was not a competitive process. Everyone who successfully applied received at least some work. There were even caps on the amount of work one group could receive to ensure it was spread around. The paperwork was arduous, with suppliers having to engage with both the Ministry of Education and the National Public Procurement Service (SERCOP). Although SERCOP officially ran the *ferias*, the IEPS was heavily involved in coordinating between the many actors engaged in the program. In fact, in conversation, most IEPS staff referred to themselves as running the programs. In this role, IEPS staff acted as advisers, helping suppliers through processes as well as, at times, advocating on their behalf—especially with regard to delayed payments.

Catalogos were a more controversial program within the IEPS, with some staff accepting them but many complaining about their operation. In a *catalogo*, PSE enterprises could apply to be listed as providing a particular good or service. There was a *catalogo* for food preparation and another for cleaning services, for instance. As with *ferias*, the product listings of *catalogos* were highly specific, both with regards to the products themselves and the prices to be paid. They were still theoretically non-competitive, although, unlike with *ferias*, where the work was shared between all applicants, with *catalogos* the suppliers were de-identified and rotated through a list, supposedly ensuring that all registered suppliers would eventually receive some work. The complaints from IEPS staff about *catalogos* primarily related to how they operated. For example, at the time of my fieldwork, suppliers only had to self-declare as being a part of the PSE, and so there were supposedly many suppliers in *catalogos* that did not belong there. The main criticism of the process related to whether or not the program was really PSE. Critics' central concern was that contracts were essentially awarded on an all-or-nothing basis. Although the rotation of suppliers was supposed to ensure the work was shared, this apparently frequently did not occur in practice. Instead, one supplier tended to dominate, which many staff felt was against the cooperative nature of the PSE.

These programs form a stark contrast against the otherwise entrepreneurial logics of the PSE, and not only because they were for public provisioning. Where the IEPS and other PSE proponents were emphasising the need to be innovative and add value to your product, in both *ferias* and *catalogos* there was almost no capacity to do this. In both programs, the prices to be paid were predetermined by the government. The products to be delivered were highly specified, down to the daily egg that had to be provided for each child in the case of preschool catering. A foundational assumption for both programs was that the best economic outcomes came from careful planning and execution by

government, rather than the free action of the market. They were key examples of economic processes founded on bureaucratic logics.

The importance of *ferias* and *catalogos* created a tension for PSE enterprises. In their ideal form, as promoted by the IEPS, they were innovative and entrepreneurial, while also being organisations that worked to specific, extensive bureaucratic requirements and costs. They were at once supposed to compete in the private market on quality, presentation, and price, while not competing for government contracts—instead sharing government funds between enterprises. As discussed later, this sharing of government contracts was one of the key markers that separated the PSE from the regular private market in the eyes of both PSE producers and IEPS staff. At the same time, the IEPS as a whole played an important role in articulating these contrasting economic logics into a coherent policy framework. This was achieved through the labour of staff in interfacing between the many actors involved.

Coastal Food, an association providing pre-school catering, offers an excellent example of how different logics could be articulated. One of the few very successful PSE associations based on the coast, they had initially been established in conjunction with a local religious school that provided care for children with special needs. With support from the school, they had expanded through successive *ferias inclusivas* until they were providing food for around six hundred pre-schoolers. This was a large operation providing four meals plus a glass of juice five days a week to children at several centres. Reaching this scale was a lengthy process that took several years, as the association used the revenue from each successive *feria* (as well as grants and loans from other sources) to buy the necessary equipment to expand and improve their services.

Speaking to both the committee and Fanny, a local IEPS staff member, I asked if they had plans to expand further.

“No, because there are restrictions,” responded Juan Pablo, the treasurer. “I mean, I can’t just take the benefits myself. It has to benefit other organisations, because there *are* others. It’s solidary (*Es solidario*).” He continued to note that while the law restricted them from expanding to other childcare centres, they could expand in other areas.

Fanny leapt in to specify. “In the private market.”

This exchange again highlights the different logics by which the bureaucratic aspects of the PSE operated. Juan Pablo acknowledged there were legal restrictions to further expansion and appeared to genuinely accept them. His spontaneous description of sharing the benefits of the *ferias* as solidary reinforced that competition was not an underlying logic of this part of the PSE. Instead, it operated under the principle that benefits had to be shared, even if they did not have to be shared perfectly evenly. As noted by Graeber (2015), one of the biggest appeals of bureaucracy is its supposed fairness. *Ferías* were emblematic of this in their promise of fairly shared benefits for all successful applicants. In theory, no one could monopolise them. This runs directly contrary to the market logics of entrepreneurialism, in which the greatest good comes from each pursuing their own self-interest. If one person or corporation becomes dominant in the marketplace because of its innovative practices, so be it, though they may themselves become ripe for entrepreneurial disruption. Bureaucratic logics were not isolated from or directly competitive with entrepreneurial logics, however. They became intertwined in the PSE, as the talk of expansion into the private market revealed.

The board ran through some of their ideas for moving into the private market. Their main idea was to expand the meal delivery, but focus on people with special dietary requirements, especially the elderly or those with medical conditions that made it hard for them to leave the home.

This was important to the committee to retain their PSE identity.

“We are from the PSE,” explained Erica, the president, “and we want to work with people also from the PSE.” As she explained a few more ideas for expansion, she reinforced that they, the committee, all thought it was important to put people above money. For Coastal Food, serving these groups who were assumed to be disadvantaged in different ways was an important part of their commitment to the PSE. It also made good business sense.

Juan Pablo continued the discussion by going into a bit more depth about types of dietary requirements and concluded by emphasising the idea was to provide lunches according to the different needs of the people. Fanny jumped back into the conversation. She was beaming by this point, clearly excited with both the success of the organisation and their plans for the future. This was possibly the biggest example of success for the IEPS in her region.

“They’re segmenting the market,” she explained, “children, people with illnesses, et cetera.” Her smile conveyed that this was a display of smart business acumen.

The trajectory of the association was an almost textbook example of one of the key paths to success envisioned by IEPS staff during my time in Ecuador. *Ferías inclusivas* had operated as an important stepping stone for the association—they had provided the initial opportunity for the group to form and provide a service. By this logic, the anti-competitive nature of *ferías*—no one who successfully applied missed out on work—allowed it to act as an important and stable resource. The lack of competition provided the stability a new association desperately needed. The association had also received financial support from both the IEPS and the school they were based in to purchase the equipment they required. The money from *ferías* was used to pay staff, repay loans, and generally expand the enterprise. The *ferías* could only sustain them to a point, however. The same anti-competitive logic of the *feria* limited the expansion of Coastal Food. If the work was to be split among all successful applicants, there were tight limits on the extent to which the association could expand

from government procurement alone. If they wanted to expand further, it had to be into the private market.

By conceiving of government procurement as a resource to launch PSE enterprises, IEPS staff articulated the bureaucratic logics of *ferias* and *catalogos* with the more entrepreneurial values they promoted. That public procurement became a resource for entrepreneurial ventures was not inevitable. When I conducted fieldwork for my minor thesis in 2015, I studied a *fería inclusiva*. During my time there, I spoke to IEPS staff about the program and the logic behind it. What was emphasised to me repeatedly was that the *feria* was itself a form of redistribution.⁷⁸ While they were just beginning to really promote the formation of associations in order to make the microenterprises more sustainable, IEPS staff still emphasised that the redistribution that *ferias* entailed was an end in and of itself. By 2018, this had changed. No one mentioned that to me. Instead, *ferias* were repeatedly emphasised to be a stepping stone toward the private market. Engagement with bureaucratic structures had shifted from means for redistribution to an opportunity to seize in order to build an association. In this process, the need to expand was uncritically accepted. The idea that an association might not need to expand into the private market if government procurement contracts were enough to get by was never addressed.

A large part of the need for expansion into the private market stemmed from the perceived precarity of the PSE, both as a policy framework and an alternative economy. During my time in Ecuador, IEPS staff ran far more projects aimed at readying PSE actors for the private economy than public procurement—equipping them with the necessary skills to add value to their products and

⁷⁸ This correlates with similar observations from Nelms (2015a) from even closer in time to the creation of *ferias*.

become successful entrepreneurs. The perceived political instability lent a sense of precarity that drove both the IEPS and PSE organisations to diversify into the private market, even if the number of associations that actually found sustainable success outside of government contracts was miniscule. The pervasive sense of precarity and the entrepreneurial aspirations from Chapter Three served as the push and pull for IEPS staff to encourage PSE enterprises into the private market.

Zooming out, the need to operate across different economic domains and the difficulty for PSE enterprises to do so in many ways created a justification for the IEPS to continue to function, even at a time of relative fiscal austerity. This movement between divergent economic logics is reminiscent of the anthropological literature on brokerage, from which much of the work on advisers takes its inspiration. Molland (2022, 2012), for example, when examining brokers in migratory processes in Southeast Asia, highlights how brokers are reliant on disparate processes that are often conceived of as contradictory. In the case of labour migration, Molland highlights how “safe migration” both helps produce and relies upon the very migration brokers it is supposed to eliminate. The brokers benefit from the distinction created between different types of migration. The IEPS similarly found its purpose through mediation between different processes. It helped PSE enterprises gain access to desired government contracts, while also helping government departments fulfil their legal obligation to procure through the PSE where possible.⁷⁹ Conversely, the IEPS was much less involved in the administration of *catalogos*, with SERCOP largely being able to handle them internally as they were much more automated. That many of the key critiques of IEPS staff toward *catalogos* were issues that could only largely be resolved through active management of procurement processes (e.g.,

⁷⁹ These requirements varied by region, level of government, and size of purchase. In Quito, for example, municipal regulations meant that local governments had to purchase at least 5% of their budget from the PSE.

determining the legitimacy of PSE status) indicated that the reduced need for the IEPS was of great concern among its staff.

The uncertainty and perceived precarity of the PSE, both as a policy framework and an alternative economy, worked to destabilise the IEPS (especially at the level of individual staff) while also providing a strong reason for its existence. Koster and van Leynseele (2018), in their excellent introduction to a special issue on brokerage in development, highlight that enduring is one of the remarkable things about brokers. Despite appearing to be beholden to other political and economic forces—brokers do not control the resources they channel nor the groups they channel them to—they are able to construct surprisingly durable assemblages that adapt to shifting environs. Many individual IEPS staff came and went. Because many staff were employed through their social contacts, as new managers were instated and networks of contacts at the IEPS were displaced, they, too, were forced to leave. And yet the institute as a whole endured. In fact, even as Lasso, an extremely right-wing president, was elected in 2021, the IEPS has continued to function, “doing what we’ve always done” in the words of one of my contacts. The work of articulation provided little stability for individuals and yet managed to help the IEPS as an assemblage to endure.

Rather than the endurance hypothesised by Hada Weiss (2022),⁸⁰ however, that serves to reinforce the status quo of capitalist exploitation, the assemblage formed around the IEPS always had a latent hope. Despite my interlocutor’s cynical words about doing what they’d always done, she was one of the most motivated IEPS staff and passionate PSE proponents. Rather than enduring without hope, articulating between different organisations and economic logics was more akin to waiting

⁸⁰ See also: Hage (2015, esp. 35–39).

patiently, or sometimes impatiently, for a chance to seize an opportunity and further grow and strengthen the PSE. Rather than a cobbling together of resources out of desperation, the articulation of IEPS staff formed an assemblage of latent opportunities, complete with a sense of both constant action and coiled energy waiting to spring.

This twin feeling of always having to keep moving while waiting for the right opportunity also fits with the work of Koster and van Leynseele (2018). In talking about brokers and assemblages, they borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and Latour (2005). However, in response to critiques that focusing on assemblages tends to objectify structures, and “thereby obscure actually existing social practices, relations and institutional arrangements” (Koster and van Leynseele 2018, 804),⁸¹ Koster and van Leynseele encourage anthropologists to focus on the verb ‘assemble’ rather than the finished product of an ‘assemblage’. The PSE was not a finished political project and never will be. The constant turnover of staff indicated that the assemblage will never be complete. Similarly, neither staff nor PSE producers waited passively for opportunities to arrive—opportunities were created. Therefore, rather than trying to capture the PSE as a specific assemblage in the moment of time that constituted my fieldwork, instead I turn my attention to the work of the IEPS as brokers—tracing the work they did to forge networks and mediate between different economic logics.

Assembling a Network

To understand how *capacitaciones* like those at FENOCIN worked to build a network, they cannot be viewed as isolated events. The IEPS, as well as other related groups, were constantly organising talks, panels, workshops, conferences, etc., all related to the PSE. There were familiar faces at many of these

⁸¹ For a clear enunciation of this critique, see: Brenner, Madden, and Wachsmuth (2011).

events—government functionaries, academics, NGO staff, politicians, and even some PSE actors themselves. This is not to say all events had the same cast of actors. Round tables organised by universities tended to have more academics and NGO staff, with the occasional functionary. The only representatives from PSE enterprises tended to be those invited to present, rather than those sitting in the audience, though often the same people were invited from the same list of organisations to represent PSE producers. On the other hand, the IEPS organised *mesas de reflexión*, which featured PSE actors themselves.

Mesa de reflexión could be loosely translated as ‘space for reflection’, though in this context it was a specific event with a relatively standardised format. In contrast to the *conversatorio* from the previous chapter, the attendees at the *mesa* were overwhelmingly from groups other than the IEPS. Not only that, but rather than a series of talks, passively listened to by a room full of government functionaries, the *mesa* consisted of a series of discussions in separate rooms, moderated by the IEPS. Members of PSE organisations make up the bulk of attendees, as well as a few academics and staff from other government departments. As discussed throughout this section, the format of the event gave it a very different affective tenor to the *conversatorio*. Rather than moderating collective effervescence, if anything, the *mesa* served to heighten it.

The topics of discussion for the *mesa* were theoretically dictated by those present, though, in practice, IEPS staff played a strong role in shaping discussion. Attendees were first asked to brainstorm what issues they thought were the most pressing for the PSE. Then, the latter part of the event was dedicated to also coming up with potential solutions. The focus was on public policy, with the end goal being for the IEPS to create a report it could pass along to the office of the vice-president and the Ministry for Economic and Social Inclusion, as well as use for advocacy with other relevant government departments. For instance, a common complaint received by the IEPS was that payments

for public contracts were often late. PSE organisations requested that government departments be forced to pay a fee if payment was delayed. The IEPS used the report generated to attempt to persuade SERCOP to try and change policy to reflect this. The report was supposed to serve as a potential resource in their work of articulation, particularly in their role as advocate on behalf of PSE producers. As discussed in this section, however, the event at which the report was drafted also served an important role in assembling a PSE-oriented network.

Whether or not the IEPS achieved shifts in public policy (they had not managed to persuade SERCOP to change their policy by the time I left Ecuador), bringing diverse groups together who had vested interests in PSE policy worked to create a perceptible network. The *mesas de reflexión* were unofficially integrated with the *capacitaciones*, as those participants who were most engaged at the workshops were often those who came along to the *mesas*. In fact, toward the end of the year, the Zone 9 team held a series of *mesas* where the reflections from previous ones, as well as the most engaged participants, were passed along to the next, culminating in an event with over fifty participants. In comparison to the *conversatorio*, to which all IEPS staff within a day's drive had been invited, the recruitment process for the *mesa* could be imagined as a pyramid. From the many *capacitaciones* organised by the IEPS, a few of the most engaged went on to attend a small-scale *mesa de reflexión*. The most enthusiastic from that event then went on to attend a larger *mesa* with representatives from diverse organisations, including different levels of government, NGOs, and academia. This pyramidal structure also effectively acted as a filter, as the least engaged at each event tended to not go to the next, until at the final *mesa de reflexión* of the year, over fifty quite enthusiastic people (more than half of whom were PSE actors) were gathered in the one place to talk about the PSE.

This sorting of attendees did not decontextualise them in the same way that Tsing's (2015) mushrooms were. Whereas commodification of matsutake mushrooms required the erasure of their

histories and prior contexts, *mesa* attendees were there precisely because of their unique histories and contexts—PSE producers might have been the majority, but IEPS staff really did work hard to invite a variety of PSE stakeholders, from producers to consumers, to academics, to government officials. Even so, the overall process of the *mesa* served to decontextualise and standardise the information the attendees provided in order to better serve the IEPS and, by extension, PSE producers.

The culminating *mesa* was held in the inner north of Quito, organised by the Zone 9 team. They brought together representatives from several government departments (including the authority for food safety and SERCOP), academics, union representatives, IEPS staff from both the local and national levels, and many representatives from diverse PSE enterprises. This was a varied cast from many different backgrounds and occupations and yet, as evidenced by repeated participation in similar events, they were provisionally cohering around a shared identity of being concerned with the promotion of the PSE.

The day followed a standard format in which we were brought together for some brief introductions, and then were split into groups to talk about specific themes. I went with seventeen other people to talk about *fortalecimiento y asociatividad*. Literally translating as “strengthening and associativity”.⁸² For the IEPS these two factors were associated with the early stages of PSE organisation formation—related to the “value adder” of Strengthening Actors. We had a round of introductions, highlighting the diversity of our group. Around half were from PSE organisations, including credit, catering, and textile associations. There were also representatives from educational

⁸² Associativity itself is discussed further in the next chapter. Here, it refers broadly to the qualities (either personal or belonging to a group) that allow people to form and maintain PSE associations.

institutions, representatives from the Ministry of Labour, and an ex-assemblyman, who was there representing a network of construction associations.

The work began in earnest when we were then given little pieces of paper and instructed to write what we thought the most pressing issue for the PSE was in relation to our topic. Once we were all done, we took turns to read them out. The issues were diverse. Some listed more abstract concerns, such as “we form [associations] to have work, not for the proper meaning of associativity,” offered by a representative of a catering association, who also called for more *capacitación*. Another said that people prioritise individualism over the collective. Others listed more practical concerns, such as the requirements made by the government contracting authority being unrealistic for associations, and payments by the government being too slow.

As each person read off their little piece of paper, they added their own commentary to it, explaining what they had to say. An IEPS staff member then took each person’s piece of paper and stuck it to the window down the front of the room. Once everyone had presented their problem, as a group, we had to select the three most important. Then we had to come up with three causes for each problem, three consequences of the main problem, and then three alternative solutions. We barely fit this into the allotted time.

The format of the event—brainstorming the problems and then the three-three-three of causes, consequences, and solution—was repeated at several events I attended organised by the IEPS and had a slightly ritualistic feel. With the little pieces of paper stuck down the front of the room, they also strongly resembled the innovation workshops observed by Wilf (2016). In his work, Post-it Notes proved essential to brainstorming and training in ‘innovation’—an entrepreneurial capacity that is exceptionally hard to quantify. He describes brainstorming sessions with Post-it Notes as developing “ritual insights”. Divorced from their context, the final expressions written on Post-it Notes had an

ambiguity that let those present read into them what they wanted. At the same time, through their arrangement into patterns, they were given weight for consideration. These patterns became “conventional visual templates of what a valid insight should look like” (Wilf 2016, 744). In the case of IEPS *mesas*, it was the recurring patterns of threes—three problems and then for each problem, three causes, three consequences, and three proposals. The format of the presentation helped make everything feel purposeful and significant, while obscuring the original intentions of the note writers.

In her observations of workshops for Australian bureaucrats, both as an anthropologist and a bureaucrat herself, Lea (2008) highlights how, in the move from wide-ranging discussion to dot points, an important shift in language takes place. Diverse stories of the troubles faced by various PSE associations and others shift into the neat, specific language needed by bureaucratic institutions and policy writers. For instance, a common concern shared by many PSE actors present was that government departments were requiring more qualifications from contractors, even if they had been working in the industry for years and had been successful with previous contracts. When written up, these complaints were parcelled out between two separate dot points—regulations of contracting entities being written without taking into account the realities of PSE associations and a lack of *capacitación* (capacity/capacity building) for the PSE sector. These were both issues the IEPS could potentially intervene in. As an entity that both organised many *capacitaciones* and engaged in advocacy on behalf of PSE actors, the framing of these problems fit well within the remit of the IEPS.

Alternatively, for issues the IEPS might struggle to deal with, a ‘problem’ could be written up as a ‘consequence’. Similar to a public consultation examined by Penelope Harvey (2017) on waste disposal in Peru, the ability to bracket the scope of discussion effectively pushed certain issues into the

background.⁸³ For instance, a few times the poor quality of many PSE goods was mentioned, often by PSE producers themselves. Both IEPS facilitators were quick to point out that this was a consequence of the lack of *capacitación* rather than a cause or a problem in and of itself. By placing quality on the consequences list, this shifted the discussion away from related issues, such as poor sales and inability to compete with private industry, where the IEPS had substantially less sway. It also presumed the cause was a lack of knowledge and precluded talks about structural issues leading to low quality goods, such as a lack of technology or investment, or discussions of limited demand for value-added products in a country of extreme inequality. On the one hand, this limiting of discussion absolutely made sense in the context of our group's topic. On the other, the topics were already set by the IEPS and therefore kept discussion to the grounds on which the IEPS was most comfortable.

These limits were not uncontested, however. Delayed payments from SERCOP were a common complaint at the *mesa* and many other events I attended. In this instance, when the issue was raised by a participant, the facilitators attempted to bracket off the topic. One of the facilitators began to say that it was not related to associativity; however, the speaker ploughed on.

“It [the financial difficulties from late payments] creates instability in the organisation. It's a source of disquiet (*Es un malestar*).”

There was a pause as both facilitators considered this. It appeared to be an aspect of delayed payments that neither had considered. They nodded their assent, and the piece of paper went up on the front window, unmodified.

⁸³ See also: Knox and Harvey (2015).

The words on the pieces of paper still had to be translated into actionable bureaucratese, however. In the case of this event, the language used by participants was rarely an issue. Most had interacted with the IEPS and other government departments sufficiently to speak the language of the PSE. The need for articulation, *capacitación*, and *visibilización* (making visible); the importance of *valor agregado*; and even the need to *aprovechar las oportunidades* (seize opportunities), was often expressed in the words of participants. Instead, the focus was on sorting the comments of participants into the right categories—descriptions of problems, their consequences, actionable problems, and suggested solutions that could be acted upon by different government departments, including the IEPS.

This act of translation highlighted the power imbalance between groups. As noted by anthropologists working with the concept of translation, it is a power-laden endeavour—what can and cannot be made commensurable between two languages and whose language gets more or less distorted in the forging of commensurability is a reflection of power relations, both of the speakers and the wider cultures to which they belong (Asad 1986; Gal 2015; Pigg 2001; Povinelli 2001). In the case of PSE procurement processes—the unofficial focus of the entire *mesa*—it was the departments who controlled funds that were clearly in positions of authority. Despite attempts like those above to reframe problems in line with the concerns of PSE associations, it was primarily in the terms of other government departments, such as SERCOP and the Ministry of Education, that problems had to be expressed. Hence, by the end of the process, the concern around delayed payment undermining group solidarity had been transformed and merged with other problems into the categories of ‘Regulations are created without the participation of PSE actors’ and ‘A lack of interinstitutional coordination’.

The ritual insights that served as the outcome of the *mesa* were produced through a process in which the many comments of participants were stripped of their context and then sorted into new categories determined by the IEPS. In this way, the very affective labour of interfacing between many

different groups worked toward an outcome that sits closer to Graeber's (2015) understanding of bureaucracy and "interpretive labour". Like Tsing's (2015) mushrooms, the concerns of those involved in PSE processes (primarily producers, but others were also considered), had to be decontextualised and rendered into categories that suited needs of the IEPS and other government institutions—categories that were legible to other government departments and actionable by the IEPS. It was up to the general public to interpret themselves in a way government bureaucracies understood, rather than the reverse. This was not, however, a straight imposition by the IEPS.

Participants attended the *mesa* hoping for their concerns to be relayed to the appropriate policymakers. Speaking to participants well after the event, they seemed genuinely satisfied by discussion at the workshop. One respondent in particular, speaking weeks after the *mesa*, said that she thought that although there had not been the progress in PSE policy she had hoped for over recent years, this time she felt like they had really achieved something different. She felt there had been good discussion and that they (meaning all participants) were putting strong proposals to the government. She really hoped that some changes might come of it. For at least a brief time, the work of IEPS staff had created a sense of both achievement and a feeling of belonging to a wider constituency.

The sense of being a part of a wider network was evident at the conclusion of the event. A representative from each group went through the lists we had created. Our group went first. The woman who read the list did so confidently and explained everything clearly. In comparison to subsequent presenters, however, she was relatively reserved. The representatives from other groups spoke like they were attending political rallies. The second one came out swinging, immediately labelling SERCOP "enemy number one of the PSE". He noted that SERCOP could fine suppliers if they failed to meet the contract, but there were no equivalent fines for the contracting entity if they also failed. The audience was drawn in, with the women next to me saying "That's how it is (*así es!*)!",

not quite under her breath. Subsequent presentations did not sound quite as much like political rallies, but they were still spoken passionately by people who clearly knew how to draw in an audience. Yawns around the room showed that people were getting tired after a long day, but the vast majority were still paying attention. There was a buzz in the room. Where the *conversatorio* was aimed at IEPS staff and served to moderate their passions for a specific vision of the PSE, the *mesa* was in many ways the opposite. It was more aimed at PSE producers and worked to mobilise passions for a particular form of PSE, albeit a form moderated by the IEPS as they subtly directed discussion.

Whether or not the final report achieved any change was ambiguous—the vice-president resigned only a few weeks after the *mesa* due to a corruption scandal and the IEPS was transferred back under the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion. It was unclear if the report ever reached her or any significant policy actors in the ministry—the practical policy outcomes were undermined by the wider political instability. Beyond the specific knowledge generated and communicated to the wider government, the sense of achievement was also a powerfully uniting factor in and of itself. A common theme throughout the anthropological literature on brokerage, particularly more recent works, is how brokers work to construct the very constituencies they mediate between (Peterson 2010; Koster and van Leynseele 2018; Lindquist 2015a, 2015b; Molland 2012; Mosse and Lewis 2006; Webb 2012).

The IEPS was not just acting instrumentally by inserting itself between these groups, however. As highlighted by Koster and van Leynseele (2018), extremely transactional accounts of brokerage often miss how brokers are themselves culturally embedded in their own social worlds. In development or activist spheres, in particular, the constituencies brokers create are not purely utilitarian groupings, but often reflect the ethics of the brokers themselves. Webb (2012) describes this as the efforts of

brokers to develop “ethical scenes”⁸⁴—constituencies of people with similar ethical schema. As per Koster and van Leynseele (2018), these networks were never finished and were instead constantly being assembled by the IEPS. Nevertheless, it was in this constant work of articulating between different constituencies that the IEPS found the value it could add to the PSE, both as an institution and as individual staff members. If, following Graeber (2001) and Munn (1992), the creation of value requires an interested audience, then a large part of the value the IEPS added to the PSE was the creation of that audience to whom the PSE was relevant. Where boredom moderated passions for better interactions between the IEPS and other institutes, interest on the part of PSE producers (and others who attended) served to add value to the alternative economy.

Conclusion

The political necessities of the IEPS as a whole were certainly relevant to the running of the *mesa*; however, it is equally important to consider the perspectives and aspirations of the government functionaries running such programs—those actually doing the work of articulation. In bringing together a diverse group of actors enthusiastic to see more support for the PSE from the central government, IEPS staff were helping create one of the groups they articulated between. This creation of a sense of unity and even, perhaps, solidarity was part of the value the IEPS added to the PSE. At the same time, it is significant that the key act at the *mesa* was an act of translation. It highlights that in their work of articulation, the IEPS was not just mediating resources—monetary, material, human, or otherwise—it was mediating logics. It is through the actions and discourse of IEPS staff that entrepreneurialism and bureaucratic regimentation are made to be sufficiently commensurate for *ferias*

⁸⁴ A term he borrows from Cohen (2010).

and *catálogos* to operate. Or, in an example from Chapter Two, it is through the mediation of the IEPS that the popular economy of a woman selling cake is made sufficiently commensurate to the innovative, value-added products of a microenterprise selling amaranth granola for a *rueda de negocios* to be a coherent event for the showcasing of the PSE.

At the same time, the IEPS was not a passive mediator—the thoughts, opinions, aspirations, and ethical considerations of staff were reflected in the outcomes of PSE policy. Both the networks formed and the material policy enacted were deeply influenced by the opinions of IEPS staff. The widely shared preference for *ferias* over *catalogos* among IEPS staff, for example, had material outcomes. One of the most common *catalogos* was for pre-school catering. While the meals to be offered were not directly listed, the Ministry of Health specified the nutritional content. When they changed the dietary requirements by adding a daily egg, the local IEPS team spotted an opportunity. The *catalogo* no longer met the requirements and so the Zone 9 team scrambled to *aprovechar la oportunidad* (seize the opportunity)⁸⁵ and organise a *feria*. By leveraging the contradiction between the required product and the available service in the relevant *catalogo*, the local team was able to organise a program that both better suited their perceptions of fairness and created a more important role for the IEPS and the labour of articulation. Several staff members even relayed to me that they hoped to set a precedent and prove that *ferias* could be as efficient as *catalogos*. The program had not concluded by the end of my time in Ecuador, so it is difficult to estimate the extent to which they were successful.

This articulation between economic logics helps add nuance to some analyses of solidarity economies, such as that of Gago (2017), where alternative economic practices—especially those of the

⁸⁵ See Chapter Two for an analysis of the importance of *aprovechar las oportunidades* to the IEPS.

popular economy—initiated by lower or working class actors are clever strategies for survival, while those encouraged or imposed from above are invariably tools of neoliberal oppression. Gago is not wrong in that the same strategies when coming from above or below have significantly different meanings in the lives of individuals. At the same time, simply writing off all acts by government actors as exploitative misses how they come to be realised in the lives of beneficiaries through long chains of mediation. In practice, the results of PSE policy in Ecuador can heighten the difficulties imposed by modern neoliberal capitalism—the precarious support for the PSE discussed in Chapter Two is case in point. These outcomes, however, are not simply the result of top-down economic reform.

Instead, as IEPS staff took actions in line with their aspirations and ethics, they opportunistically remade the PSE, as a policy framework, a network of concerned groups, and an actually existing economy. Similar to the observations of Penny Harvey (2018, 132) around policy realisation in Peru, it was disjunction between state regulations—between the need for precise dietary requirements and the highly specified structure of *catalogos*—that created a space “simultaneously threatening and replete with possibility.” In order to run a program staff perceived as fairer and in the spirit of the PSE, they took an opportunistic approach reminiscent of the entrepreneurial strategies they promoted among program beneficiaries—a way for the IEPS to add value to the government procurement process.

This is not to say that all actions by IEPS staff resulted in the neoliberalisation or entrepreneurialisation of the PSE. As discussed in Chapter One, entrepreneurial values worked their way into discussions of the PSE in large part due to pre-existing resonances and the dispositions of many different PSE proponents. Nevertheless, IEPS staff pushed for *ferias* despite *catalogos* being preferred by other, more influential, government departments because it was important to them that the benefits of government procurement programs be shared. Even the commitment to ensuring

contracted entities were associations, rather than businesses, stemmed from a sense of what was solidary, rather than simply what might lead to the most efficiency or best innovation.

In the next chapter, I examine some of the ethical underpinnings of the PSE from the perspective of IEPS staff, particularly as they related to the formation and maintenance of associations—“associativity”, in the words of my interlocutors. I show how these ethical concerns, which largely served to differentiate the PSE from the rest of the economy in the eyes of almost all of my interlocutors, also had material effects on the composition of PSE associations.

Precarious Associativity

Five Cows was a small association an hour or two outside of Quito. I was visiting with Catarina and Paulo—two members of the local team of the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS)—and two students from a local university. We were there following up on a proposed project to be run in conjunction between the IEPS, the university, and the association. Five Cows had originally been formed in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, as their way to support the Popular Solidarity Economy (PSE). The objective was for the association to collect milk from locals and onsell to Nestlé in bulk. Owning a few cows and selling milk was a common strategy for additional cash income in the region. The price received for the milk varied according to quality, as determined by fat and protein content, and could also be reduced for contamination. The milk from Five Cows was of the lowest quality, so they received the minimum price. Others in the region, especially those with the land to run enough cows to have their own collection tank, received substantially higher prices. The project proposed by the IEPS and the university was designed to improve the quality of the milk the association sold so that it could fetch a higher price from Nestlé.

As the visit went on, it became apparent that the IEPS and association members differed in how they thought the price of the milk ought to be raised. This stemmed from their different understandings of the purpose of the association and, by extension, the forms that the relationships within the association ought to take. In this chapter, I explore the tensions between how the IEPS

conceived of associativity (*asociatividad*)—the traits necessary to be part of an association—and how other groups, especially PSE actors, understood it. I argue that because of the precarious economic context, IEPS staff were largely unable to promote durable forms of relation that mapped onto the social expectations of most PSE actors. As discussed in the previous chapter, the IEPS as whole proved a surprisingly durable assemblage, held together by the mediating work of its staff. However, because of the precarity of individual staff members, and also many PSE producers, this durable assemblage failed to translate into ongoing economic interdependency. Consequently, IEPS staff were limited in their ability to promote associativity in a form that more closely resembled the types of solidarity they hoped for

The original proposal for the project was that a team of students would come out from a local university, redesign the facilities, and then return to construct them in conjunction with the association. Initially, the university was going to pay for the materials; however, due to budget constraints, this offer was withdrawn. The IEPS and the students were there to see if the project could continue in a modified form. They hoped that the association would agree to host the students so they could draw up designs and then the association could find funds, with assistance from the IEPS, to construct them.

Once the introductions were out of the way, we walked around the small facility with two representatives from the association—Jimena and Laura. The building was effectively a large open shed with two rooms sectioned off to act as the laboratory for testing milk samples and to hold the main storage tank. As we walked around, Catarina offered the advice that to raise people's awareness of the importance of the quality of the milk, you had to say no to people. If you said no to people, that would hopefully encourage them to improve their production. Catarina said that if she were told her

milk wasn't good enough, she would say to herself, "Damn! What am I going to do with all this milk?" implying that she would then work to improve it.

Both representatives gave noncommittal responses as we stepped into the laboratory. The machines and equipment had been supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture at the founding of the association several years earlier. Catarina asked if the association checked the quality of the milk. Laura said they did but not individual samples, just the whole batch. At the same time, Paulo spied two identical machines for testing milk quality. They were blocky and portable, each with an electrode that could be dipped into a sample of milk. He asked about them, pointing out that one of them had a tag saying it had been calibrated less than six months ago and was due for another calibration in a matter of days. Jimena said it was broken. This sparked a brief discussion in which Paulo insisted it worked, while Jimena insisted it didn't. Paulo then asked about the second, identical machine and whether it was broken. This time Jimena gave more of a noncommittal answer, saying that not everyone at the association knew how to use it. Paulo let the matter drop, but I noted the reluctance of both Jimena and Laura to engage with the questions of individually testing milk samples and especially the idea of refusing people's milk.

I later spoke to Paula, who had been the president of Five Cows until recently. We talked about the association and the poor price of milk. I told her I hoped it would rise. Paula was not so optimistic.

"All we can do is throw some people out," she said sadly.

"I hope they can learn how to improve the quality of the milk," I replied, thinking of Catarina's words. My heart wasn't in it and, judging by Paula's expression, she seemed sceptical as well.

"We haven't done it yet," she replied, "because they're families, and they're very poor. Because they're poor, they struggle to have good milk. But because the quality of their milk is poor, they don't

get a good price. Hopefully, if their milk is rejected once or twice, they'll learn." But again, Paula's expression conveyed her doubts.

Our conversation put Jimena and Laura's reluctance in a new light and highlighted the difference between how Five Cows members and IEPS staff understood the purpose of the association and, by extension, the mutual obligations of the relationships involved. From the perspective of the members I spoke to, Five Cows was established as a community service. The relationships it was built around were substantially more enduring than those imagined by Catarina and Paulo.

Possessing cows had been an income generating strategy in the community for some time.⁸⁶ They served as stores of value and selling milk could bring in a regular cash income. In recent years, however, the government had changed the rules around food hygiene relating to dairy products. This had made it harder for small-scale operators—especially households with only a few cows—to sell milk, either directly or to local cheesemakers, due to the extra processing and handling requirements. Five Cows was founded in response to help households sell their milk.

⁸⁶ Cattle (and other livestock) have an important place in both the economic and social structures of the Andes. Kneas (2021) has highlighted how, despite the widescale raising of cattle by campesinos being a relatively recent phenomenon in the Ecuadorian Andes, it is also deeply entwined in the construction of class and maintenance of kinship relations. Ferraro (2006), also in the Ecuadorian Andes, has tracked how the dairy trade appears to have shifted from primarily *mestizo* households to Indigenous ones. At the same time, she highlights the role of cattle in the gendered construction of the household (Ferraro 2006). More broadly, in the Peruvian Andes, Hirsch (2022) has shown how the provision of medicine and improved breeding stock can be considered a form of "extractive care", in which external actors, such as mining companies, show care for cattle as a way to both represent their own care for the local community and to extract further concessions.

Every member of the association had originally contributed money to buy the land the collection centre stood on, with many taking out loans to contribute. Five Cows was not explicitly or entirely based around a clear kinship network, though in a small community there were overlapping relations. Instead, it was founded on behalf of the town as a community. While not the only example I encountered in Ecuador, this was the exception to the rule, with most associations being explicitly founded around one, singular family. Often, associations were founded around a specific household, alongside a few of the closest extended family members. Beyond this, Five Cows was also particularly unusual in being one of the few non-family associations that had successfully operated for several years. Additionally, unlike many other associations, Five Cows bought milk from anyone in the community, not just members. At least one member had her own storage tank to ensure quality and did not sell her milk through the association. She drew no income from Five Cows. Similarly, the association itself did not generate a profit. It only covered expenses and paid suppliers. Most members had only recently finished paying off the debt incurred to purchase the land. For Five Cows members, it was essentially a community service.

This explains Paula's reluctance to turn away families with low quality milk. Even if the association was not built specifically on kinship bonds, it was still based around enduring relations in the minds of members. Paula's emphasis that turning away people with poor quality milk would be turning away families also highlighted the importance of enduring relationships to the association. Individually testing milk samples was not the same as testing the milk of individuals. Because of the kinship relationships involved, turning away an individual sample of milk would be equivalent to turning away a whole family. Paula's words and the reluctance of Jimena and Laura to talk about their testing regime emphasised that this was something they all hoped to avoid.

In comparison, for the IEPS, Five Cows was an enterprise and the relationships in which it was entangled were substantially more malleable. From their perspective, the association needed to be successful in the market in order to be sustainable. Members were aware of their precarious position as well. Paula was reluctant to refuse access; however, she also noted that they barely paid the bills, and any unexpected capital expense would throw the association into disarray. The precarious position of Five Cows seemed to demand better returns on the milk. Consequently, from the perspective of the IEPS, the priority was on improving the quality of milk.

The emphasis on quality was not simply utilitarian, however. Doing right by your association was a sign of solidarity in the eyes of IEPS staff—providing good quality milk *was* an expression of associativity for them. As discussed in chapters two and three, *calidad* was a multi-valent concept that indexed not only sensory qualities of taste and smell but also ethical ideas of solidarity and care. The advice of Catarina and Paulo was not simply the corporatisation of the PSE. The IEPS was not pushing for all PSE organisations to behave like small businesses. It was important that associations and cooperatives behaved differently to corporations to ensure the PSE was an alternative economy. The relationships between members of an association and, to a lesser degree, between associations became the focus of this need for difference under the label of ‘associativity’. For IEPS staff, these relationships were still different to those they envisioned in more typical capitalist enterprises. At the same time, they rubbed up against those of the most successful and long-term associations. Where most association members focused on enduring relationships, IEPS staff were focused on ‘horizontal’ relationships that could be more fluid in their formation and reformation—reflecting the ties that IEPS staff and other PSE proponents formed with one another in enacting policy.

In this chapter, I examine how divergent understandings of associativity between IEPS staff and PSE actors limited the ability of the institute to promote relations that built toward ‘solidarity’ of

a type aspired to by many staff. Furthermore, I show how the ‘horizontal’ relationships promoted as part of associativity reflected a contingent conjunction between the government functionaries’ understanding of sociality and the pervasive entrepreneurial logics that surrounded them. This contrasted with their perception of kinship relations, which were perceived as enduring, but also inherently hierarchical and therefore threatening to the egalitarian norms of the PSE. Following Kowalski (2021, 336), I show how IEPS staff, acting as local development agents, did not directly refute kinship or directly contrast it with liberal individualist norms, but rather mediated between different logics and “[played] on the many possible interpretations of kin relations.” In doing this, I highlight a key avenue by which the surrounding labour context of government bureaucrats, such as precarity, can be ported into their work and thus spread to other contexts.

To do this, I first analyse associativity and how it related to understandings of solidarity. Based on this, I examine IEPS understandings of kinship relations and how they were seen as both powerfully generative for PSE associations, but also potentially threatening. I then return my focus to IEPS staff and how, in response to both their limited capacity to act and the precarious status of their jobs, they promoted a form of associativity that was reflective of their own way of working as government functionaries. I conclude by relating this all back to anthropological literature on the operation of bureaucracy under circumstances of limited state capacity and how, without equal stability for government bureaucrats, the precarity they find themselves in can also be spread through their work.

Associativity

The qualities required to be a part of an association were often referred to as ‘associativity’. At times it referred to broad personal qualities, such as a general willingness to share the fortunes of other association members, good or bad. At other times, associativity could signify specific skills necessary

to be part of a cooperative endeavour, such as conflict management techniques. When used in this way by my interlocutors, it was often the topic for training sessions, as in: “Today’s topic is associativity”. Alternatively, it was often used to describe an association’s strengths or weaknesses, as in “Associativity is one of our strengths” or “That association has problems with associativity.”⁸⁷

The extent to which associativity was thought to be innate or could be taught was ambiguous. During my fieldwork, the local IEPS Zone 9 team were going through a period of emphasising the importance of associativity before formally registering an association. They were consequently often promoting workshops on the topic. PSE actors themselves also often clamoured for more capacity building in associativity, so the importance of the concept was widely shared. At the same time, there were those the IEPS encountered who they believed were beyond hope—they did not have the right mentality and could never be convinced otherwise. When considering how my interlocutors talked about it, associativity shared several key features with anthropological conceptions of solidarity—namely, a sense of horizontal power structures and relationships extending beyond immediate transactions (Durkheim 2012; Mauss 1970; Simmel 2004 [1900]). At the same time, associativity diverged from solidarity in the relative lack of emphasis placed on reciprocal exchange.

Associativity was, for many involved in PSE promotion, one of the defining characteristics that set the PSE apart from the wider capitalist economy. Before discussing it in greater depth, it is important to get a sense of how proponents saw it contrasted with other forms of economy. During

⁸⁷ To make matters more complicated, local economic literature on small and medium enterprises also used the word to describe cooperation between enterprises. Some academics worked in both spaces and used the term relatively indiscriminately. For the sake of this chapter, I am using ‘associativity’ to exclusively refer to the qualities necessary to be part of an association.

the early part of my fieldwork, the IEPS Zone 9 team undertook a series of visits to every local government in the province to see if there were any opportunities for collaboration.⁸⁸ On one visit, the mayor of a small town noted that there was an overabundance of local avocado production, and that he had a contact in another country that was keen to buy. Consequently, he wanted to set up a company, with him as the owner, to collect and export produce. The three visiting team members tried to convince him to establish an association of producers rather than a company, but he was adamant.

“When there are groups, they fight,” he said. “Better I buy it and I sell it (*Mejor compro yo y lo hago yo*).”

He then said maybe he would just establish an association with his family but admitted that he would be doing it just for the sake of complying with the law. The IEPS staff present did not say much in response to this, but they looked deeply unimpressed. Having the produce from the parish pass through a company owned by one person was very much against the idea of the PSE as a “horizontal” form of economy, and that was before the general scepticism that the mayor would likely take most profits for himself. Nevertheless, the meeting ended cordially enough, with the mayor passing along various details about the parish that the IEPS had requested.

Once we were in the car driving back to the office, I asked Catarina about what they would do. She said that they would pass the mayor’s details along to a non-IEPS department that helped with export promotion. It was all they could do. She explained that he just wanted to be a middleman, that people like the mayor didn’t think people wanted to be in associations, but sometimes it was just that people didn’t know how to be in an association.

⁸⁸ This was framed as seeking opportunities to ‘articulate’ with local governments, based on a similar idea of articulation, as seen in chapters four and five.

“Being a worker and a manager is difficult,” she explained. “Not everyone can do it.”

Catarina continued to explain that some people prefer to be on a contract so they can receive a wage no matter what. Passion built in her voice as she said that many people didn’t understand that in an association you share the profits and the debts. “We’re trying to make a new economic system that is horizontal, not vertical.” She finished up by noting that this was why they were really pushing for people to understand the PSE before starting an association. If they didn’t understand or weren’t enthusiastic, the IEPS wouldn’t push them into creating an association. “You need to make sure they all have the same idea,” explained Catarina. “Otherwise, a little bit of money and it all falls apart.” Apparently, a lot of associations had disaffiliated in the previous three months.

The tensions between the mayor and Catarina helps reveal the understanding IEPS staff had of what made the PSE different to the wider economy—that it was a ‘horizontal’ form of economy. Among IEPS and other PSE proponents, this sense of ‘horizontal’ took on a variety of meanings, but it generally referred to a sense of power dynamics in which all participants in an association, and the broader economy, were relatively equal in their authority. This tended to go hand in hand with a sense of how the benefits (primarily profits), debts, risks, and losses of the enterprise were to be distributed. In the eyes of the IEPS, the mayor was potentially erring on three fronts. Firstly, in setting up a company, the mayor would be the sole authority and owner of capital, creating an unequal distribution of power within the enterprise. Secondly, if successful, the distributor would have substantial authority relative to the producers. Finally, despite the mayor’s claims that he was doing it for the community, in the car on the way home the consensus was that he would take the lion’s share of the profits.

These critiques fit broadly within conceptions of solidarity that also emphasise horizontal relations. Anthropologists working with anti-neoliberal activists highlight how it is the ‘horizontal’ nature of their labour that distinguishes it as solidarity, for both activists and anthropologists (Cabot

2016; Muehlebach 2012; Rakopoulos 2015). In comparison to their own actions, activists emphasised how charity and humanitarianism relied on unequal relationships between the giver and receiver (Cabot 2016; Muehlebach 2012). In the case of charity, Cabot's interlocutors even thought that the pleasure of the donor stemmed from the inequality, something reinforced by Bornstein's (2005) observations of child sponsorship among religious development organisations. From the perspective of activists, this meant that both charity and humanitarianism continued systems of neoliberal exploitation. In comparison, they emphasised that the relationships they developed were horizontal and therefore not exploitative.

Both Cabot and Muehlebach highlight that their interlocutors were aware that it is not so easy in practice to separate their own volunteer labour from wider systems that allow for further withdrawal of the state. Muehlebach notes this tension in how the labour regime of voluntarism could be described as both part of neoliberal exploitation associated with the withdrawal of the state and also a way to negate and overcome the capitalist alienation of labour. Cabot (2016, 163) describes this eloquently as "sustaining partial alternative worlds within intolerable systems".

While most PSE organisations were for profit and paid their staff, rather than relying on volunteer labour, the importance of horizontal relationships was commonly emphasised by all proponents I met. Relations within associations were supposed to be equitable—one person, one vote, in comparison to voting options relative to stock held. Leadership positions were also supposed to rotate, with no one serving more than one or two terms in the same position, depending on the constitution of the association. Relations between associations and other organisations were also supposed to be horizontal, with neither the buyer nor seller having the upper hand. Of course, in practice, this could vary substantially and, as discussed in a later section, could lead to tensions between

the desire for very equitable relations among association members on the part of state authorities and the reality of the web of relations in which members were otherwise entangled.

Another key criterion for being a part of the PSE was the ability to participate in enduring economic relationships, ones that extended beyond simple exchange—in the case described by Catarina, beyond the simple employee-employer relationship of labour in exchange for money. From this perspective, associativity shared a lot with classical anthropological thinking on solidarity. As noted by Komter (2005), a common element to early theorists' work around topics of solidarity, sociality, and reciprocity was a sense that no relationship could ever be entirely utilitarian nor entirely altruistic. Work by Mauss (1970) on “the gift” is possibly the most famous in this regard, although it is a common theme recurring in the works of Durkheim (2012), Malinowski (2014 [1922]), Lèvi-Strauss (1976), and even Weber (1947). Academics from many disciplines working in the alternative economy space, including theorists of the PSE, share this assumption that any successful re-envisioning of the economy needs to address both self-interest and mutuality. In the words of Hart, Laville, and Cattani (2010, 5), there needs to be a “unity of self and society”. Associativity shared this ambiguity—being a part of an association was both a means to an economic end but also an affective relation that stretched beyond any immediate exchange.

However, the ability of the IEPS to promote these affective ties was limited. Becoming part of an association tied one's fortunes to the rest of the group in a way that was more reminiscent of Durkheim's (2012) mechanical solidarity rather than organic solidarity. The latter, typically associated with “modern” forms of solidarity according to Durkheim, relies upon a division of labour and the mutual interdependence it entails. PSE organisations generally lacked this division both within associations and, because they almost all produced similar products, between associations. The fortunes of association members among themselves and as a sector were largely intertwined through

their common economic practices—they generally performed similar activities to produce similar products or provide similar services. This is in comparison to Durkheim’s conception of “organic” solidarity that is based around mutual interdependence and forged through difference. PSE actors were not engaged in many different stages of a supply chain, for instance, in which all mutually depend on one another.

In turn, the lack of interdependence made for restricted opportunities or need for reciprocal practices, such as exchange. Certainly, ‘reciprocity’ was a commonly cited virtue in both PSE literature and discourse, but the types of small-scale, low-capital-intensity production that the vast majority of associations engaged in meant that most association members could do most jobs. There was little reason for members to exchange with one another or with other associations. Being a part of an association did not intrinsically require the displays of reciprocity and obligation that authors such as Mauss (1970) and Simmel (2004 [1900]) see as the cement that binds the social together.

In fact, as discussed in the next section, my observations seemed to testify to the reverse—it was among those groups where there were already ties of reciprocity and obligation—typically kinship ties—that associations tended to flourish. IEPS staff and other PSE proponents had ambivalent opinions of kinship ties within the PSE, however. As anthropologists working on microcredit schemes and other family-oriented businesses have observed, kinship ties often create bonds that undergird entrepreneurial and microentrepreneurial forms while also threatening their ongoing survival (Ellison 2018; Schuster 2015; Shever 2008; Yanagisako 2002). Shever’s (2008) study of associations in the oil fields of northern Patagonia offers an excellent example. The formation of numerous small enterprises based on friendship and family groupings, typically by ex-employees of the previously state-owned oil enterprise, is portrayed by Shever as a neoliberal experiment in privatisation and decentralisation. Nevertheless, the reforms created a series of small enterprises (called “associations”) from groups with

tight relations, who typically structured themselves along strongly egalitarian lines. These associations were then expected to become entrepreneurs, to compete in the open market for contracts with the corporations owning the rights to extract oil.

The outcomes of the privatisation process bear a striking resemblance to the associations promoted by the IEPS, albeit working in a much more capital intensive and more technologically dependant industry than in Ecuador. In northern Patagonia, Shever observes how kinship ties worked to cement associations by giving members reason to work incredibly long hours for minimal and uncertain returns. At the same time, they also threatened the survival of those same associations. Kinship responsibilities were difficult to shrug off, especially at a time when associations had no way of providing sufficient work for all who needed it. The responsibilities of associativity constantly threatened to spill over beyond the association.

A Marriage of Ten People

The IEPS's concern with the internal dynamics of associations went deeper than the concerns Catarina and Paulo had with the quality of Five Cows' milk. The internal dynamics of an association was one of the key areas where PSE proponents established the difference between it and the wider economy. Consequently, the IEPS and other state-based institutions related to the PSE found themselves deeply concerned with how associations were run. A glimpse of the kinds of procedures emphasised by the state was offered in a *capacitación* organised by the IEPS. It revolved around one of the few moments of contestation between a participant and the trainer. The topic of discussion was the role of family within an association. Eduardo, the trainer, was beginning a new session with his regular practice of asking audience members a little about themselves. He asked one participant who the director of her association was. It turned out to be her older sister.

“Why is she the director? Because she’s the older sister?” asked Eduardo in an accusatory tone.

The woman denied this and said that it was because she had led them in the process of becoming an association. Eduardo didn’t refute this directly but emphasised that they should rotate leadership. “What happens with ten, twenty years of the same leadership?” he asked us rhetorically.

The implication was that having the same person in the position indefinitely was a bad thing. Eduardo never explained why it would be bad, however, as Penelope spoke up. She was one of the youngest people at the *capacitación*, in her mid-twenties, and one of the more outspoken. She stated that her association was a family association. She continued to say that they had experienced problems but were doing well. She didn’t see what the issue was with a family association. This sparked a back-and-forth discussion, primarily between her and Eduardo with occasional input from others.

Penelope’s position was that there were no real problems with family associations. Eduardo’s was that family associations were fine (he noted that apparently 90% of Ecuadorian businesses were family businesses), but that there were issues when either the same people remained in charge or when there were non-family members who were a part of the association but were not granted the same rights and benefits as family members. This seemed to resonate with the audience, with a number of them nodding their assent. As she came to see that Eduardo was not against family associations in and of themselves, Penelope relented and ended up agreeing that he was raising legitimate issues. The final discussion ended up focusing on two factors: who was allowed to take on official roles within the organisation (everyone agreed every member, regardless of whether or not they were family) and whether those with specific roles could stay there indefinitely (the consensus was that they shouldn’t, though I encountered many exceptions to this during my fieldwork).

To some extent, the two seemed to be arguing at cross purposes. Penelope apparently thought Eduardo was against all family associations, while he was advocating the importance of placing

institutional norms ahead of kinship obligations. Their disagreement, however, highlighted their different understandings of kinship. As Lazar (2018) has observed in her work on solidarity among unions in Argentina, the language of kinship was often used to express the closeness of bonds among associations. Like the union members, this was in part because the bonds of association membership and family frequently overlapped. At the same time, as Lazar proposes, rather than simply treating these relations as fictive kin, understandings of kinship can help unpack the politics of these networks.

In the case of associations, on several occasions I heard the experience of being in an association compared to being in a marriage, always by PSE actors. Penelope herself at one point spoke about how being a part of an association was difficult. “It’s like being in a marriage,” she said, “but with ten people.” This description well represented both the difficulties and closeness of the bonds within successful PSE organisations. When I asked association members how they decided who to let in, overwhelmingly the most common answer was trust. Similar to the money-lending circuits observed by Vélez-Ibáñez (2010), confidence appeared to be what held most associations together. Like the money-lending circuits, association members were not necessarily engaged in relationships that required reciprocal exchange. Instead, it involved the pooling of resources, which required great trust. The most successful associations, in my experience, were therefore those where relations of trust already existed. These were primarily kinship groups, although a few NGOs (often associated with church groups) were able to leverage their long-term relationships with a community to create larger associations and cooperatives.

In comparison, in talking about family, Eduardo was assuming family was almost intrinsically hierarchical and that it lacked transparent accountability. Although not explicitly stated, similar to Kowalski’s (2021) observations of gender counsellors in India, kinship was implicitly portrayed as coercive and primitive. Returning to his initial comments about the audience member’s older sister

being the director, Eduardo was expressing a common fear among PSE proponents, especially bureaucrats. They feared that kinship relations, which were assumed to be hierarchical (such as a mother over her daughter or a father as the patron of his whole household), would take precedence over the horizontal relations that they felt should predominate. Eduardo feared that an older sister would always be an older sister, even if she were no longer a director. This also intersected with ideas of how entrepreneurialism operated, though this is discussed in the next section.

Beyond the assumed hierarchy of family, PSE proponents often talked about how, although associations were supposed to be founded upon sociality and solidarity, this was to be filtered through a framework of rules and statutes that people ought to stick to. By following the regulations, horizontal relationships ought to be emphasised and accountability ensured. Similar to corporations involved in microfinance group lending (Schuster 2015) and the authorities involved in the repayment of those loans (Ellison 2018), Eduardo and IEPS staff were advocating narrowing reciprocal obligations to those expressed in legal, contractual form. Associations could draw on kinship ties as a factor of production—with many association members commenting that they worked long, hard hours, particularly during the crunch time for delivery of a contract—but the association itself had to take priority over those self-same ties. During a previous activity, Eduardo had constantly emphasised the importance of an association's statutes in determining what was to be done with any profits. Even if all members unanimously agreed to do something else with them, if the statutes specified how the profits were to be distributed, there was no alternative. The legal and written norms came first.

In a similar vein, one of the obligations of associations was to hold an annual *rendición de cuentas*. Similar to an Annual General Meeting of a club, society, or cooperative, this was where the treasurer and president took the entire association through the finances of the past year. Eduardo pointed out that often in family associations, people did not feel the need to keep strict accounting, but this was a

mistake. Even if you were family, strict accounts still had to be kept. On several occasions at different workshops, trainers emphasised that showing the accounts was an act of solidarity. For IEPS staff, carefully following the rules relating to finances was essential for an association, not just for practical matters of transparency but to build group solidarity. In doing so, rather than outright rejecting kinship, they were leveraging assumed norms of care and solidarity among kin in an attempt to reconfigure relationships. Rather than trust being about not having to show financial accounts to family members, *rendición de cuentas* framed ‘opening up the books’ as a way of showing solidarity with the rest of your family.

This image of solidarity expressed through following explicit rules, whether they related to transparency and accountability, the distribution of profits, the rotation of positions, or the inspection of accounts, sat awkwardly alongside the fact that the vast majority of associations I visited were based around families, with the very occasional close neighbourhood contact involved as well. Similar to the family businesses studied by Yanagisako (2002), PSE enterprises were often founded as tools for family reproduction while, at the same time, the family became an important factor of production. It was often on the labour of kin working long hours for minimal pay that associations were built, just as the family was reproduced (at least in part) through the earnings of the association.

Relations external to associations, especially kinship relations, were threatening from the perspective of the IEPS due to the particular way associativity had to be made legible to the institute. As highlighted by Nelms (2015b), who also conducted research with the IEPS, how to establish the PSE as a ‘social’ alternative was a perennial problem for not just the IEPS, but all state organs related to the PSE. Given that the vast majority of businesses in Ecuador (90 per cent, according to Eduardo) were family enterprises, almost everyone I spoke to associated kinship relations with the wider economy. This perception was likely heightened by the fact that many of Ecuador’s largest

businesses—especially the supermarket chains that many Ecuadorians regularly encounter, even if they cannot afford to shop there—are family-owned empires. Concepts like ‘associativity’, which discursively held the PSE apart from the rest of the economy, had to be held apart from the kinship ties that were presumed to prevail in the rest of Ecuadorian life.

Associativity also had to be rendered legible for the state to prove this difference. Horizontal relationships and an equitable distribution of profits therefore became key markers of difference and, by extension, primary concerns of the IEPS. Kinship relations, while often powerfully productive for associations, worked in the eyes of many PSE proponents under very different logics and were therefore threatening. Saiag (2013), in the context of a de-industrialising city in Argentina, highlights how as sources of steady wage labour dried up the household and kinship became both a potential source of security against bad fortune, but also a potential liability in the case of unexpected financial obligations. Beyond the financial considerations, for IEPS staff, if someone put being the patriarch of a family ahead of being an association member, relations might no longer be what IEPS staff would consider “horizontal”—enduring hierarchical relations might be reintroduced between members.

The threat of relationships external to the association turned the attention of the IEPS to the internal dynamics of associations. The Ecuadorian state lacked the capacity to closely monitor the myriad of registered PSE associations, so the internal dynamics of associations generally only came to the attention of the state if someone made a formal complaint to the Superintendency of the PSE. However, according to many I spoke to, up until several months to a year before I arrived, the Superintendency had been going through a period in which they had closed down many associations, and even cooperatives, due to failure to comply with regulations. While I was there, a new superintendent was appointed who promised to take a more conciliatory approach; however, people

had already been made wary. The IEPS were therefore paying renewed attention to how people behaved within associations.

As argued in the next section, because the IEPS lacked both resources and regulatory authority—effectively, they had neither carrot nor stick—they had to resort to paying careful attention to the ‘mentality’ of association members, both potential and current. Associativity effectively became a matter of personal responsibility.

The Right Mentality

A recurring theme in analyses of neoliberalism is a shift whereby individuals are rendered responsible for work that was previously considered the duty of the state, often referred to as ‘responsibilisation’ (Rose and Miller 1992; Ellison 2017; Shore and Wright 2011; Rankin 2001). Trnka and Trundle (2014) highlight that the term runs the risk of being drastically overused and turning ‘responsibility’ in all its guises into an exclusively neoliberal concern. Instead, they argue that anthropologists should pay attention to the many relationships, ideals, obligations, and dependencies people find themselves ensconced within. This is an insightful critique, and the dilemma of competing responsibilities (particularly between kin and PSE ideals) is one that many involved in the PSE were familiar with. It was these competing responsibilities that concerned the IEPS. Unlike normal conceptions of responsibilisation, ‘associativity’ was never considered a duty of the state. Even so, I argue here that because the IEPS paid much attention to PSE producers having the right mentality, ‘associativity’ was effectively rendered as an individual responsibility. Even if this focus on mentality was not a direct link to neoliberalism, its focus on internal thoughts and feelings meant it resonated with wider discourses on entrepreneurialism in which the passionate individual is the locus for innovation and disruption (Hogarth 2017, esp. 258–59).

The importance of having the right mentality and its relationship to the statutes of an association was driven home by Eduardo on the last day of the *capacitación*. He started the day by saying that we were going to talk about the laws that governed the PSE sector and began to make a list of them on the whiteboard. This almost immediately became a discussion of the qualities you needed to be a part of the PSE.

When writing up the law determining the ownership of an association, he noted that “It isn’t mine. It’s the group’s. It’s everyone’s.” He continued to define an association as a group of people with a common purpose. He stated that “In the PSE, you have to change your mentality. When you start, first there’s the statutes. They say what you can do with the profits. They also determine when someone can enter, leave, or be expelled from an association.” Again, the idea of having the right mentality was bound closely to being able to follow the rules of the association.

Eduardo then said that the fundamental questions you had to ask yourself were, “Am I capable of being a member? Can I not be selfish (*¿No tengo egoísmo?*)? Can I make decisions as part of a group?” He explained that most associations didn’t fail due to lack of sales, but due to attitudes.

Apart from emphasising the ideally horizontal nature of relationships in the PSE, by putting the focus on attitudes, Eduardo was placing success on a factor that was in control of the individuals comprising an association, rather than anything external or systemic. This emphasis on needing the right mentality served to put much of the responsibility for being a successful association back on the individual. Not only that, but once it was the responsibility of the individual, having the right mentality became a moral obligation in a similar sense to that used by Muehlebach (2012) in her work on “the moral neoliberal”. Rather than morality as a negation of neoliberal market rationalities, morals and ethical values sat in productive tension with them—guiding PSE actors and proponents in taking actions that were both economically rational and moral in their own terms.

IEPS staff often talked about having the right mentality or “chip” for the PSE. When I asked Paulo what he thought it would take to really grow the PSE in Ecuador, he said he thought it would be a change of consciousness over three or four generations.⁸⁹ He noted that at the moment people often cut in queues because they can get away with it. He said they would probably not pay if they thought no one would notice. For Paulo, these were signs that most Ecuadorians did not have the right mentality to really be a part of the PSE. Paulo then told a story of what he thought Ecuador needed.

“Somewhere in Europe is country where if the toll machine for the bus is broken, they just hang a little basket. Everyone puts in their 25 cents, and if they only have a dollar, they put it in and just take the change they need. If we can have that level of consciousness, we’ll succeed.”

⁸⁹ To the best of my knowledge, this focus on mentalities was not related to the works of Lewis (1959) on cultures of poverty, though there were resonances—particularly when an incorrect mentality was used as an explanation for a group’s economic shortcomings. Instead, discussions of mentality appeared to align more with Che Guevara’s (1965) on the New Man in Cuba, especially in their shared use of the term “consciousness” (*consciencia*). This was never stated explicitly and nor was it clear if my interlocutors were aware of Guevara’s use of the New Man. Nevertheless, unlike “cultures of poverty”, my interlocutors talked about needing the right “mentality” and “consciousness” for the wealthy, not just the poor. Although at times it might explain why a group or community was failing to do well economically, this was more likely to be due to having an unsuccessful association full of infighting than the psychological pathologisation of poverty. Similarly, Paulo was not talking about a change of consciousness in only poor people. It was also the wealthy, such as the mayor from earlier, who needed the right mentality so as to not exploit those less fortunate. Having the right mentality meant that everyone was willing to work hard for the good of all rather than their own enrichment. See also: Martinez-Saenz (2004).

Given that 25 cents was the price of the bus in Quito, I understood that the literal truth of the story was not important for Paulo. Instead, it highlighted Paulo's ideal of what would be necessary for the PSE to function, and it was for every individual to have the right mentality.

The qualities necessary to be a part of the PSE and to be entrepreneurial were not considered to be the same. For instance, a lack of self-centredness (*egoísmo*) was often listed as crucial to being a part of the PSE, while IEPS staff often listed a lack of confidence as holding people back from entrepreneurial endeavours. At the same time, rarely if ever were these qualities spoken of as being in conflict.

Occasionally there was even the unspoken sense that the two were somehow mutually reinforcing. This was best captured in the expression *viveza criolla*, used by some of my interlocutors. A difficult expression to translate, *viveza criolla* literally means 'creole vivacity', but from my interlocutors it meant something more like 'creole cunning'. Although not always used in relation to the PSE, *viveza criolla* often described an action that led to short-term profit or benefit for an individual or small group at the expense of others. At the same time, it contained a sense of making the overall situation worse for everyone over the long term. An example of this was one of my interlocutors talking about intermediaries inserting themselves into the supply chain between farmers and shops. She complained that while, by doing so, they made some quick money, not only did they reduce the money farmers received for their produce, they also raised prices for consumers, meaning they purchased less and thus drove down the whole market for everyone. In this way, while *viveza criolla* did not directly highlight any virtues shared by entrepreneurialism and the PSE, its use did underscore that both could be undermined by the same vices—in the case of intermediaries, greed.

Whether with regard to entrepreneurialism or the PSE, the extent to which the right mentality could be cultivated or was simply given was ambiguous. Instead of considering a change in chip as a

cultural argument, instead I follow Schuster (2014) in seeing it as a way for my interlocutors to create an intervention that navigated between the individual and the systemic. In her work on microfinance and micro-entrepreneurialism in Paraguay, Schuster (2014, 47) observed the head of a microfinance NGO borrowing from the methodology of Alcoholics Anonymous in an attempt to “bring about a transformation in consciousness”. Although the microfinance organisation acknowledged systemic issues surrounding poverty, including culture, a focus on “interiorization” shifted the weight of intervention onto the individual.

This resonates with Muehlebach’s (2012) observations on the moral basis of neoliberalism. In her work, she examines a boom of voluntarism in northern Italy that occurred in lock step with increasing privatisation of welfare and the withdrawal of the state from the labour of social reproduction. Muehlebach highlights how morality is not opposed to market orders but is indispensable to them. In this twin process of increasing voluntarism and state withdrawal, Muehlebach, like David Harvey (2005), sees “hypermoralisation” as accompanying “the gospel of laissez-faire” (Muehlebach 2012, 6)—an “overweening morality as the necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure” (D. Harvey 2005, 82).

In comparison, the PSE, while sharing many qualities with entrepreneurial neoliberalism, involved far too much market intervention by the state to be described as “laissez-faire”. Even so, the self-conscious bonding of market principles with social values by theorists and practitioners of the PSE, as well as those actively labouring as economic agents, supports Muehlebach’s wider argument that heading into the twenty-first century we are witnessing a new shift in liberalism’s dual ontology of morality and the market. However, where she argues that “the supposedly dystopic neoliberal order is in fact increasingly dependent on and enabled by new forms of utopia” (Muehlebach 2012, 19), I highlight that even the PSE—an economic form intentionally created to oppose neoliberal forms of

capitalism—is subject to the same structure whereby an economic order is dependent on visions of a moral utopia.

Rather than being a direct cause of the supposed “atomization” of neoliberalism (Muehlebach 2012, 6), I argue that the individualising focus of PSE proponents on people’s mentalities is caused by the wider systems of precarity in which they were enmeshed. Despite not being considered a neoliberal government at the time of my research, as there was no large-scale withdrawal of the state, the Ecuadorian government’s support for programs such as *ferias*, *catálogos*, and *ruedas* was always suspect. There was a constant fear by PSE proponents that support could disappear at any time. Without this certainty, responsibility for maintaining the PSE as an alternative economy fell onto the individual. Even at workshops where IEPS staff emphasised to participants that the state ought to guarantee their rights, they immediately followed up by saying that it was up to those present to demand the state fulfil its responsibilities. Even the state completing its role was the responsibility of the individual.

Beyond this institutional precarity, however, due to the uncertain conditions IEPS bureaucrats found themselves in, the forms of associativity they encouraged tended to reflect their own patterns of networking and career trajectories. In the next section, I examine how the constant shifting between jobs, organisations, and even industries matched how PSE proponents framed associativity and how this potentially clashed with the more kinship-based understandings of many PSE actors.

Beyond the Family

The last important piece to explain how associativity was often cast as an individual responsibility was the relative inability of the IEPS to promote the types of relationships among association members that would have led to forms of solidarity more in-line with traditional anthropological theory. I have argued here that the IEPS was largely unable to promote the relationships of reciprocity and obligation

that theorists of social movements have identified as essential to the formation of solidarity (Cabot 2016; Rakopoulos 2015). Consequently, the IEPS instead focused on the individual mentalities of association members.

Since at least Weber (2013), bureaucracy has been associated with a lack of passion, disenchantment, and an outsourcing of affective labour (Graeber 2015; Gupta 2012). Given that the IEPS itself is a bureaucracy, its inability to promote the required forms of sociality might appear self-evident. Many I spoke to who were involved in forms of solidarity economy outside of government described in various ways how once the government became involved in social projects like the PSE, they lost some sort of essential spark. These observers tended to say that the programs became about following regulations more than solidarity or associativity, or that previously successful practices simply fell apart. In moments of deep cynicism, sometimes even IEPS staff said that anything the government touched broke. This is a common observation across multiple sites of solidarity, with the interlocutors of both Cabot (2016) and Rakopoulos (2015) reporting that they thought that if the government became involved in their solidarity projects, they would lose something essential that made them truly about solidarity. The authors take these statements at relative face value, joining many other anthropologists following in the Weberian tradition of assuming that bureaucracy disenchant the world. In comparison to this disenchantment thesis, I follow more recent anthropologists working on bureaucracy who examine the affective underpinnings of bureaucratic action—in particular, how bureaucrats' constructions of their own identities are reflected in their work (Ansell 2014; Cooper 2019; Cowan 2020; Lazar 2017, 2018; Nading 2017; Street 2012).

That there was some sort of 'spark' missing from many PSE associations and projects was not lost on IEPS staff, especially those that had been part of the institute for several years. Talking to Mathilde and Roberto—two IEPS staff members who had been with the institute off and on since

almost the beginning—they both complained that the IEPS no longer paid enough attention to “the social” (*lo social*).

“The IEPS isn’t focusing on the idea of the PSE anymore,” complained Mathilde. “They’re just focused on economics and poverty alleviation.” She continued to offer the example of Hilando el Desarrollo—one of the largest ongoing PSE programs in Ecuador, in which uniforms were made for almost every public primary school in the country. They used to host a big party for everyone to get together and celebrate the completion of the program. By 2018, however, the IEPS had stopped organising such events.

“They just turn in the uniforms and that’s it,” she concluded.

Roberto agreed, saying that the IEPS didn’t dedicate enough time and resources to social things.

Mathilde then contrasted this with the example of Grupo Salinas—an NGO that was the go-to example for PSE in Ecuador—which she emphasised did pay a lot of attention to the social. For her, this made it really PSE at the same time as it offered strength to the organisation.

I see the relative inability of the IEPS to promote the forms of sociality that proponents like Mathilde and Roberto saw as necessary as stemming from a clash in understandings of associativity. Although PSE promoters recognised the power kinship relations could offer associations, they also had reservations, as they worried kinship relations could usurp the horizontal relationships they advocated for the PSE.

In comparison, PSE actors themselves often ascribed the success of their associations to enduring kinship bonds and the trust they involved. These relations were not necessarily hierarchical, and I certainly saw examples where Ecuadorian kinship norms appeared to be overturned—young women holding positions of authority within associations, for example. However, intergenerational

kinship patterns often did map onto the committees of associations. Middle-aged family members were often directors, treasurers, and secretaries. Similarly, though there was more variety, gender often appeared to play a significant role in the makeup of committees, with women generally more likely to hold positions of authority in enterprises working in industries more typically associated with feminised labour, such as catering, sewing, etc.

In comparison, with regulations theoretically enforcing the swapping of personnel in positions of authority within associations, even if they were often overlooked in practice, IEPS staff and many PSE proponents were effectively advocating for a more fluid understanding of associativity in which individuals regularly shifted responsibilities and authority. The relationships between association members, and to an extent between associations, were supposed to be ‘horizontal’ in large part because members could generally be substituted for one another. Because most associations did not engage in highly technical production, whether similar substitutions were to be expected for skilled labour was left ambiguous. With regard to administrative positions of authority, however, rotating positions was clearly associated with horizontal and therefore egalitarian relations. The reasons why it was bad for the same individual (especially a particular family member) to continually occupy the same position was rarely discussed and was largely treated as given. Occasionally, as per Eduardo’s example, swapping positions was talked about as relating to equality—such as an association that was mostly family not allowing the one non-family member to be president

When I asked people involved in PSE training and promotion about the importance of swapping positions, they often talked about the need for new ideas. Alejandra was an excellent example of this. She was the university student tasked with assisting FamiTech—the IT association from Chapter Two—with their business strategy. During our discussion, she mentioned that she thought an ongoing challenge for the association would be separating the business from the family. If they didn’t,

it could be a problem when they had to swap roles and when people from outside the family had to integrate.

“Why would it be a problem if they just kept it to the family?” I asked.

“It’s not certain that it would be a problem,” she replied, “but new people bring new ideas.” She then proceeded to offer an example of another family business and how an outsider brought in the idea of some short videos advertising their products.

Here, the horizontal relationships of the IEPS overlapped with entrepreneurial ideas of innovation and flexibility. Despite the previously mentioned fact that the majority of purchasing from the PSE was done through government contracts that allowed for no flexibility in product or price, new ideas and innovation were still portrayed as the key to success for PSE enterprises. Speaking with multiple staff members from different divisions of Grupo Salinas, each of them reported that one of the keys to success for the organisation was how it incorporated knowledge from outside. Sometimes this was just outside the organisation, sometimes it was from outside the town of Salinas, and sometimes it was from outside of Ecuador. This knowledge varied from different shop layouts to different styles of cheese that appealed to a wealthier clientele. While relations did not have to be perfectly egalitarian at all times, for many PSE proponents I talked to (both inside and outside of the IEPS), a rotation of responsibilities and, ideally, the ability to incorporate external ideas were clearly strategies that both satisfied affective appeals to egalitarianism and proved to make good entrepreneurial sense.

This fluid conception of associativity, in which people’s responsibilities could change as they moved around an organisation, reflected the types of bonds forged by most IEPS staff and other PSE proponents. As discussed throughout this thesis, many IEPS staff during my fieldwork shuffled in and out of the IEPS and even the public service more generally. Precarious employment practices meant

that it was rare that staff stayed in the same team, or even institution, for much more than a year. Not only that, but shifts between the public service, NGOs, political parties, and academia were common. Contact was regularly kept across these workplaces, however, as people moved around—especially where people studied part-time degrees together. At times, promises to keep in touch seemed overly optimistic, and many of my interlocutors appeared to lose track of one another as they moved around. Others, however, were maintained or simply renewed as people came into contact with one another again. Similarly, several IEPS staff mentioned throughout this thesis left the IEPS and returned to different teams, rekindling friendships with those few who had managed to stay there or who had recently returned themselves. Granovetter (1995), in his classic study on employment among professionals, reminds us of the power of these weaker contacts. Although they might not be as motivated to help, distant contacts are more likely to move in different circles and are therefore more likely to encounter different opportunities to those you and your close contacts find. Many people operating in and around the professional promotion of the PSE moved through jobs inside and outside of the IEPS taking advantage of such connections.

Programs and projects were created along these bonds, and occasionally PSE enterprises were simply sent to contacts in other departments when IEPS staff thought they had a friend there who could better help. A key example of this was Francesca, who had previously worked at the IEPS, left, and returned. She had worked at the IEPS during the time that the national government and municipal government of Quito were at odds and IEPS staff had been unofficially instructed to not cooperate with ConQuito. Teresa, who worked with the PSE at ConQuito, and Francesca were friends, however. She revealed to me that Francesca had sent several PSE enterprises to her when they had failed to get help from the IEPS, despite this being a potential threat to Francesca's career. The story was reported to me with a sense of admiration on Teresa's part. During my time in Ecuador, when Moreno was

president and relations were thawing between ConQuito and the IEPS, both Teresa and Francesca were representing their institutions on a new collaborative project. An ability to maintain contact across shifting positions and responsibilities was key to the success of the new project.

Rather than kinship relations, which were often portrayed as enduring and hierarchical by PSE proponents, IEPS staff, through their work with the PSE, maintained fluid relationships. A roster of connections came and went and potentially came again. The precise formal relationship between an IEPS staff member and another contact varied as their jobs shifted relative to one another, but through their work, their careers, and even their side hustles, they constructed themselves as successful PSE proponents with horizontal relationships similar to those they encouraged in PSE actors. Associativity for IEPS staff tended to look very different to how it did for PSE actors. This is why the IEPS was able to create a network of similarly minded PSE proponents through conferences, workshops, and *mesas*, like those discussed in Chapter Five, but they struggled to form close-knit associations. The former was a loose and flexible web, in which there were potential opportunities for cooperation should the chance arise, but it did not represent the tightly woven and enduring bonds that many PSE proponents said they wanted to see between association members. Unless there were pre-existing relationships of obligation (primarily family), the IEPS were rarely able to promote enduring kinship-like bonds, especially when those same relations could threaten the association. Instead, the uncertain and ever-shifting style of relationship formation tended to predominate—the same precarious style as was reflected in PSE proponents' own careers.

Conclusion

A large part of the dilemma of Five Cows—whether to reject milk samples to improve quality or continue to accept them and receive a poor price—related to the perceived purpose of the association.

To what extent was it there to generate profit for milk suppliers and to what extent was it there as a community service to allow everyone to receive at least some cash income from their milk? This quandary only made sense in the wider context of uncertainty around the future of milk prices and the association itself. For the time being, the association was paying its bills; however, any unexpected expense would likely force the hand of its members, while a rise in the price of milk would potentially ease the pressure to reject samples. The relationships constructed within and around the association were, to a large extent, determined by the surrounding economic context. The lack of certainty around the context translated into a lack of certainty around those relationships, at least in the face of IEPS scrutiny.

That relationships were greatly influenced by the surrounding economic context was not unique to the PSE. Nor should kinship relations be essentialised as inherently enduring and hierarchical in comparison to relationships founded around entrepreneurial ventures, even if IEPS staff often talked about family as if this were the case. Just as economic conditions can affect relationships within enterprises, they can affect kinship relations. Anthropological works on microfinance, for example, highlight how debt can, at times, almost entirely restructure families (Ellison 2018; Han 2012; Schuster 2015). Instead, the focus of PSE proponents on the mentalities of PSE actors in order to encourage associativity represents a contingent convergence of the PSE as a set of social values with currents of entrepreneurial economic logics prevalent both in Ecuador and globally, all against a backdrop of economic precarity.

In the case of IEPS staff, constantly shifting jobs and even the projects worked on was a reflection of the economic context in which they found themselves. This precarity in the workplace was echoed in the forms of associativity they promoted. A concept key to PSE economic forms, associativity was not just neoliberal individualism by another name. Equal distributions of profits and

votes in decision-making processes, along with broader commitments to horizontal relationships, marked associativity as different—to a large extent, these were the qualities that, for IEPS staff, marked the line between a PSE enterprise and a small business.

At the same time, associativity bore the marks of the precarity experienced by the bureaucrats (and to a lesser extent, NGO workers) who promoted it. Rather than being centred on enduring relationships, the horizontal ties that formed the cornerstone of associativity were somewhat generic, in the sense that a base assumption was that any member was at least theoretically capable of fulfilling any role of authority in an association. There also appeared to be the implicit assumption among PSE proponents that a reasonably constant shuffle in positions and responsibilities, especially if external ideas could be brought in, would lead to innovation and avoid stagnation. This was despite the fact that almost all the PSE organisations I encountered that were successful over the extreme long term—those like Grupo Salinas that technically predated the enshrinement of the PSE in the constitution—often had one or more key figures who had been at the helm for decades.

Finally, given the limited resources of the IEPS, they were able to intervene in the relationships within PSE associations only in a restricted way. Without substantive financial, material, or political resources, the IEPS were unable to offset the uncertain economic context surrounding almost all PSE enterprises. As per the example of Five Cows, without stability, the relationships within associations were in flux. More than that, however, without resources, a focus on “changing the chip”—reshaping people’s mentalities—became the key way in which IEPS staff saw themselves as being able to stage an intervention. Despite associativity as a concept focusing on relations, for the IEPS it took on a distinctly individualistic emphasis. This focus on both the individual and their mentality resonated strongly with wider discourses on entrepreneurialism.

This link between entrepreneurialism, morality, and individualism sits well with David Harvey's (2005, 82) assertion that the moralism of neoliberalism works to "help keep the body politic secure". Similarly, the relative inability of the IEPS to promote the relationships of solidarity that many staff wished for appears, at first, to fit with traditional Weberian portrayals of bureaucracy as disenchanting. Works by anthropologists studying bureaucracy, especially in contexts of limited state capacity, however, emphasise the affective strategies and relationship building that goes into the actions of government functionaries (Ansell 2014; Cooper 2019; Ellison 2018; Nading 2017; Street 2012). Furthermore, the ideological commitments of IEPS staff, especially to economic forms such as PSE associations that were distinct from neoliberal enterprises, show how the individualisation of otherwise inherently social concepts, such as associativity, is not unique to neoliberalism. Instead, it is the wider precarious context that pushes government functionaries tasked with roles in economic development to pursue actions that focus on the mentality of the individual. This does not contradict Harvey, but it does point in the direction of at least one specific, causal factor—precarity.

Associativity, in the form promoted by IEPS staff and other PSE proponents, shows how neoliberal economic logics spread and find purchase in new contexts, not just as policy enforced from above, nor as creative improvisation by the economically disadvantaged on the coal face of economic reform—"neoliberalism from below" as Gago calls it (2017). Instead, the formulation of associativity by the IEPS highlights how the wider life experiences of government functionaries, especially as they relate to their jobs, deeply shape how bureaucrats realise their work. In the case of those tasked with economic development, especially the implementation of a new form of economy, instability in their own economic situation encourages them to port this uncertainty into the economic forms promoted, not just as an unfortunate necessity, but as entrepreneurial values to be aspired to.

CONCLUSION

Precarious Alternative

The wheels of the pickup truck slid over the stones as we rounded a bend in the dirt road. A precipitous hill to my right made me nervous, but the driver, Pablo, was in a hurry. We were out doing a round for an NGO as part of a major project run in conjunction with the National Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy (IEPS). This was a separate part of Hombro a Hombro—the program mentioned in Chapter Six. Aside from updating Salinerito brand stores, the program also involved renovating around 15 small cheese factories in little communities around Salinas de Guaranda. The project was due to conclude during my fieldwork; however, it was running behind schedule. There had been lots of small problems that cascaded and slowed the process down. At one factory we visited, for instance, several doors did not fit their frames, leaving large gaps. Without tightly fitting doors, the factory was unable to get an update on its food handling licence to produce other cheeses and doubt was cast on whether it could maintain its current licence. Pablo had been contracted by FUNORSAL (Foundation of Campesino Organisations of Salinas)—a member organisation of Grupo Salinas. The role of FUNORSAL was to provide technical assistance to the various other arms of the group. Pablo was a *técnico* (advisor/consultant) and was in charge of coordinating with local communities hosting the program. We were heading out to check the state of previous problem-solving efforts. He was rushed because someone else needed the truck that afternoon. Both the project, and our drive, were in some ways a microcosm of the situation of the PSE in Ecuador.

Conclusion

The first factory we visited, Beautiful Flower, was based in a small village wedged into a saddle between two steep hills. The community itself had fewer than one hundred residents. The manager of the cheese factory was there pasteurising milk. Pablo only asked a few questions, largely leaving the manager to his business while the two of us rushed around taking measurements. Around helping Pablo, I managed to speak to the manager a little. The cheese factory had been started in 1987, but according to him it had been badly managed and gone out of business. He restarted it in 2007 and it was doing much better. It received milk daily from around 13 people in the community, though they themselves often represented extended families pooling their milk. The factory paid them 42 cents per litre. This was the legal minimum at the time; however, from my experience, it was rare that family suppliers (some providing as little as ten litres) would get even that much anywhere else. He told me that, on average, they paid a bit over US\$1,000 per month to the community. It did not entirely form a living for any particular person providing milk, but it was a substantial amount of income for the village as a whole.

We were not there long, however, and soon Pablo and I were racing off to the next community. The townships were not far apart geographically, but the rough roads made the going slow. During a brief burst of mobile phone reception, Pablo called back to the office to see if the car was still needed that afternoon. Fortunately, it wasn't, so we were able to slow down somewhat on the road. We were also able to pick up a few locals as we moved between towns, dropping them here and there along the route so they could shorten their walks a little. As we drove, I asked Pablo a little about himself. Born locally, he had been working on this project for about a year, though he was thinking about putting together a new CV, as this project was soon coming to an end. Soon, he would be looking for work. Pablo was a local and tried to get work in development projects around his local province where possible. Previously, he had spent a year working on another project for FUNORSAL. As a *técnico*, his

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employment was tied to the project rather than the organisation. This still put pressure on Pablo to work fast, as the final payment for the project was being held back by the IEPS until they reached a set milestone. Speaking to other FUNORSAL staff later, I found out that none of the *técnicos* had been paid in five months and everyone was getting quite nervous. Through loans and support from family, they were all making it work, but the situation was precarious.

As our drive continued, I asked Pablo what his plans were for the factory. Almost none of the doors had fit, with some being off by as much as ten centimetres on all sides. He said perhaps there had been a mixed-up delivery. Regardless, there were other factories with similar issues and if he could reuse the doors at one of them, it would reduce a bit of work for the team. More importantly, it would save some money, as without the final IEPS payment, they were having to ask local authorities for donations. Reusing the doors would at least prevent them buying some more materials. In the meantime, Beautiful Flower continued to operate, making cheese, buying milk, and generating a small income for locals.

Pablo's situation, our drive, and the cheese factory were in many ways a reflection of the wider situation of the PSE in Ecuador, including many of its contrasts. Pablo was dedicated to improving his local community, continuing to work for five months without pay attested to that. Nevertheless, he could only do so by stringing together different short stints of precarious work. Staff working on the project were desperately seeking out opportunities to try and get it over the line, asking for money from the local government and beseeching the IEPS for a micro-disbursement to try and buy the materials needed for the final stage. In doing so, FUNORSAL was effectively recreating the work of the IEPS at a smaller scale—opportunistically forging a network of diverse actors in order to scrape together whatever resources were available. If it were money from the local government, that was

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great. If it were free doors, they could still be put to use in a different town.⁹⁰ And if the pickup was making semi-regular trips between the communities and could offer locals a lift, all the better.

The cheese factory itself and its spotted history was also representative of PSE endeavours. While the formal association was relatively recent, Beautiful Flower had an informal history that spanned back through intermittent cycles of operation. Its central practice of buying milk from the local community and selling cheese was itself a precarious endeavour. Production was reliant on successful agriculture, which was always uncertain. The profitability of the enterprise was based on the success of another, larger brand—Salinerito—and market demand for cheese *de calidad* more broadly. Part of the project with the IEPS was to create specific branding for Beautiful Flower and have them sell directly to the public. On one level, this was another example of a drive toward microenterprise as a strategy for economic growth. However, speaking to both IEPS staff and the manager of the Consortium Foundation of Community Rural Cheese Makers (the foundation in charge of over thirty of the cheese factories belonging to Grupo Salinas), the branding for Beautiful Flower and other factories was actually aimed at providing more stability for the association

In a parallel to other PSE enterprises who almost entirely survived off government procurement contracts, the Foundation's cheese factories overwhelmingly sold to Grupo Salinas, using the latter's *Salinerito* branding. Demand for cheese and milk production varied seasonally, however, and there were months when the Foundation simply could not buy all the production from its member

⁹⁰ It is worth noting that the project had a complicated structure. The IEPS could not directly fund FUNORSAL. Instead, it was officially funding the communities who then hired FUNORSAL to carry out work on the project. This meant that the doors technically belonged to the specific cheese factory at Los Arrayanes, though this did not seem a relevant detail to anyone involved.

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organisations. The branding was supposed to help offset these seasonal fluctuations. I asked several of my interlocutors how this worked if there were times when the market was saturated and Grupo Salinas was struggling to move products. Both IEPS and Foundation staff were quietly certain that the individual cheese factories would be able to find outlets for their products, even during these times of glut, largely through their own personal networks—namely, local community shops and stores owned by relatives in other towns. Perhaps this would not be enough to sell their entire production, but it would hopefully be enough to help get them through more difficult times. Entrepreneurial strategies and ventures became an important part of sustaining an alternative economy.

It would be a mistake to dismiss PSE policy as simply neoliberal entrepreneurialism in another guise, however. The cheese factories were officially associations, which meant, as I discuss in Chapter Six, they all had shared ownership and decision-making, as well as an even distribution of profits. For other organisations, such as FamíTech from Chapter Two, the entrepreneurial flexibility central to the PSE meant freedom for members over their schedule so they could spend more time with family. For many IEPS staff, being part of a PSE enterprise meant participating in an ethical form of economy that cut against the economic mainstream and was part of a wider international movement. At the same time, these ostensibly anti-capitalist concerns resonated with entrepreneurial ideas of flexibility, disruption, and even morality.

Zooming out from the specifics of a single bureaucracy in Ecuador, the work of IEPS staff to sustain the PSE as an alternative to capitalism directs our attention as anthropologists and theorists of the state more broadly to questions of change and alterity within bureaucracy. There are numerous examples of anthropologists and other theorists approaching the state and government not as

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monolithic entities, but as being comprised of groups and individuals with competing goals and ideals.⁹¹ While these approaches acknowledge the diversity of opinions and perspectives within the state, little attention is typically paid to how that diversity is maintained. The anthropological instinct to examine social collectives in minute detail, generally via the ethnographic method, almost presumes there will be divergent perspectives among any group of people. This instinct is not necessarily wrong, and nor does one have to go to the other extreme of constructing the state and its organs as totalising and homogenising (e.g., Graeber 2015; Gupta 2012; Herzfeld 1993; Scott 2005). Nevertheless, the labour expended by IEPS staff in keeping the PSE alive as a viable theoretical and policy framework highlights that sustaining alternatives, be they political, economic, or otherwise, takes work. Bureaucrats might have divergent opinions simply because they are individuals with their own life experiences; however, maintaining a coherent concept to guide policy that tacks against wider political and economic currents is exhausting labour.

The work of keeping a precarious alternative alive, however, is not just experienced in the political realm. Returning to Millar's (2017) call for more works that bridge the gap between precarity as a condition of labour and as an ontological experience, the precarity of 'precarious alternative' emphasises that alternative economic projects are not precarious solely due to lack of political support. Because economics has to be practiced in order to be anything more than theory, an alternative economy has to be lived, not just theorised or bureaucratically managed. Critiques of portrayals of the Weberian bureaucrat trapped in an iron cage are so numerous as to almost be take-for-granted within

⁹¹ For a small selection of the whole, see: Biershenk and Olivier de Sardan (2019), Billaud and Cowan (2020), Ferguson (1994), Forbess (2022), Greenhalgh (2008), Harvey and Knox (2015), Koch and James (2022), Lea (2008), Lipsky (2010), Street (2012), and Wedel et al (2005).

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anthropological circles (e.g., Ansell 2014; Cooper 2019; Cowan 2020; Lazar 2017, 2018; Lea 2008; Nading 2017; Street 2012). In fact, almost all these critics always refer back to the same trio of scholars still working in a loosely Weberian tradition—Graeber (2018, 2015), Gupta (2012), and Herzfeld (1993). Nevertheless, those critics rarely examine bureaucrats' own perceptions of their supposedly disenchanted colleagues.

An alternative economy like the PSE is precarious in large part because it needs to be different from the rest of the economy, but not so different that it cannot articulate with it. Bureaucrats working to promote alternative economies and politics have to live this fine difference. They need to engage in economic practices that mark them as different to the mainstream. And yet, because an alternative economy cannot be entirely insulated from the wider economic context, those practices constantly risk collapsing back into the wider *mélange* of daily economic interactions. In the case of the PSE, wider discourses of entrepreneurialism had their appeal and IEPS staff engaged with them, adopting many entrepreneurial logics. At the same time, they also sought to differentiate themselves from both a heartless market and a heartless bureaucratic machine. By embracing affective ideals of associativity, staff constructed themselves as different from both other, unfeeling bureaucrats and the wider capitalist economy.

For many, their work was precarious, but so, too, was their status as agents of an alternative economy. Similar to Ansell's (2014) interlocutors in Brazil, who were pushing for major political and economic reform, a lot of the energy of IEPS staff was spent on reformatting their own perspectives to fit with their ideals—to experience the “thoughts and feelings” of working with other people in an association that Matilde mentioned in the Introduction. At the same time, these thoughts and feelings were a potential entry point for other logics—a way for bureaucrats pushing for a particular alternative to bring other influences into their work. In the case of IEPS staff, the logics of entrepreneurialism

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had a real, felt appeal. Ideas of innovation and seizing opportunity resonated with their experience of promoting a precarious alternative economy. As argued by Sopranzetti (2017), this appeal of entrepreneurialism is not a form of false-consciousness. It is felt because it connected the felt needs and desires of IEPS staff with the requirements of a wider economy and political context in which everything was uncertain and liable to change at short notice. As much as entrepreneurialism ran the risk of dragging the PSE back into wider economic structures, it also offered the chance at disrupting them as well.

As established in Chapter One, in large part the resonances between entrepreneurialism and PSE values existed before the latter was even legislated in the Ecuadorian Constitution. The PSE as a theoretical and political discourse emerged out of a set of anti-neoliberal protests, primarily organised by Indigenous organisations. The language of the PSE was reflective of these movements but never explicitly referred to them. Without this historic mooring to specific demands of equity and redistribution of land and wealth, as the memory of protest and constitutional reform faded, those aspects of PSE discourse that resonated with entrepreneurial ideals were increasingly emphasised. Globally, those who self-identify as entrepreneurs valorise disruption, flexibility, and innovation. They similarly assume government is incapable of efficiently managing economic or social matters. These beliefs resonated with those of PSE proponents, who also felt the need to disrupt the major economic players in Ecuador and also had a mistrust of the government. Even if those who advocated for the PSE as a viable alternative economy came to these positions for different reasons, the similarities to discourses on entrepreneurialism left them primed to adopt similar economic logics and strategies.

These logics and strategies were explored further in chapters two and three. In a context in which both the careers and middle-class status of IEPS staff were precarious, entrepreneurial logics of seizing opportunities and self-making intermingled with an emerging form of left-wing middle-class

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values. Because the PSE involved practices that theoretically stemmed from the popular economy, some enterprises bore a dangerous semblance to informal economic practices. In particular, seizing opportunities was deeply important to IEPS staff with regard to their work, their careers, and the enterprises they supported. A cake seller seizing an opportunity to sell delicious, slightly hipster cake at an IEPS event is an excellent example of these blurred boundaries.

Calidad (quality) in particular was used to describe a number of characteristics that marked PSE products as desirable to IEPS staff and others working in PSE promotion. A concern with the quality of products was a marker of both the anxieties around popular support for the PSE and the middle-class status IEPS staff aspired to for PSE production. In its ability to index a number of interrelated characteristics, *calidad* served to help blur the boundaries between the popular economy and middle-class entrepreneurialism. This had the effect of both helping PSE projects appear more cohesive while also potentially undermining the class status of IEPS staff and others working in PSE promotion.

IEPS staff utilised entrepreneurial strategies as a way to reconfigure themselves as part of the PSE and, by extension, an imagined global network of socially conscious middle-class consumers. Through its attachment to wider practices of socially responsible consumption, the PSE represented to IEPS staff a way of affirming not only their middle-class status, but their connection to a wider international, ethical community. This attachment to ethics also served to differentiate passionate PSE proponents from what they conceived of as other members of the middle-class, who were not so ethically engaged. At the same time, the overall effect of this confluence between particular middle-class consumption patterns and PSE production was to reinforce the entrepreneurialism of numerous microenterprises attempting to produce value-added consumer products aimed at middle-class Ecuadorians—a highly precarious economic strategy.

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Central to the influence of entrepreneurial discourse on the shape of the PSE as a policy framework were the values and perspectives of those tasked with promoting it. Without the ability to directly fund their own projects or the political authority to compel other organisations to enact programs, IEPS staff could only enact policy by creating a shared sense of identity around the PSE. As discussed in Chapter Four, IEPS staff used a strategy of articulation to try and align the perspectives of different organisations. Due to their lack of funding and political support, however, staff primarily had to shift their own perspectives to better integrate and mediate between other groups. They were essentially engaging in a different type of bureaucracy in which they were taking interpretive labour unto themselves, rather than other bureaucratic strategies in which that labour is foisted upon others (cf. Graeber 2015, 2018; Gupta 2012; Herzfeld 1993).

As demonstrated in chapters five and six, the need to articulate multiple groups with their own understandings of appropriate economic practice had multiple effects on the realisation of the PSE as both a policy framework and an alternative economy. Firstly, because articulation at its heart was an act of translation, the relative authority of different groups influenced the shape of the PSE. As support for a thoroughly alternative economy waned, values that had previously been considered non-monetary had to be translated into dollar terms. At the same time, the meaning behind different economic strategies shifted as well. For instance, where government procurement had previously been considered a form of redistribution, by the time of my fieldwork, most IEPS staff and PSE producers considered it a source of funding to launch an enterprise. While forming what were essentially small businesses to sell to consumers with little guarantee of ongoing business was an inherently precarious proposition, diversifying into the private market was seen as a way to hedge against the uncertainty of future political shifts in Ecuador. When considering sources of precarity, it is important to not always

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look toward the market. Sometimes the market is a way to hedge against precarity experienced elsewhere in a person's life.

Not all shifts necessarily meant the further encroachment of entrepreneurial or neoliberal logics into the PSE, however. IEPS staff and others working in related areas worked hard to try and ensure alternative economies remained in some way different to the economic mainstream. In the case of the PSE, this was largely realised through an emphasis on 'associativity'—the qualities needed to be a part of a successful association. With limited capacity to influence the surrounding political and economic context, IEPS staff focused on the mentalities and internal relationships of PSE associations.

In many ways, the focus on mentalities of PSE producers fits in to earlier discussions of the ethicality proponents conceived of as being central to the PSE. By positioning actions such as a regular rotation of management positions or the *rendición de cuentas* (showing of account books) as acts of solidarity, IEPS staff were attempting to influence the running of PSE enterprises through the construction of what were appropriate actions and relationships within associations. Kinship relations, while often central to the formation of successful PSE enterprises, were potentially threatening to the PSE, as they operated through different logics. IEPS staff and other PSE trainers therefore worked hard to assert the primacy of rules and regulations over kinship norms. The particular connections they encouraged strongly resembled those through which IEPS staff often found opportunities in their own careers—looser connections in which the precise relationship between individuals readily shifted, broke, and reformed as they moved through different jobs at different institutions. The need to keep people shuffling within associations was also painted as important for generating new ideas and keeping PSE enterprises innovative. This linked PSE associations back into wider entrepreneurial logics at the same time as the emphasis on shared decision-making and profit distribution pushed against traditional capitalist logics.

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From the structures of feeling invoked to promote the PSE, to specific interpretations of appropriate relationships within associations, the perspectives of frontline IEPS staff were essential to the shape the PSE took and government policy realised. While the precarity of the PSE, both as a policy framework and an actually existing economy, was in many ways a result of the wider precarious context, it was through the lifeworlds of middle-ranking bureaucrats that entrepreneurial economic logics were ported into the PSE. Rather than purely being imposed from the top down by higher management or adopted by poorer PSE producers as a survival strategy, it was the valorisation of entrepreneurial logics and strategies (such as innovation, added value, and the need to seize opportunities) by IEPS staff that made the PSE more entrepreneurial. This account does not deny that there are many positions within bureaucracy in which the agency of government functionaries is largely circumscribed. However, following in the footsteps of other anthropologists who examine government bureaucracy in regions of low state capacity, I emphasise the importance of the perspectives of bureaucrats and the relationships they attempt to forge (Ansell 2014; Cooper 2019; Nading 2017; Street 2012).

While the stability of secure employment has not been the norm in Ecuador, the precarity experienced by IEPS staff during my time there was extreme. Beyond the expected disjunctures that a constantly shifting roster of personnel might have on policy (such as miscommunication or loss of talent), the experiences of precarity had an effect on the strategies pursued by government and NGO staff, as well as PSE producers themselves. Given the precarity of both staff and the IEPS as a whole, entrepreneurial strategies that focused on the short term with a utopian long-term vision were sensible choices. While policy choices from higher levels of government both within and outside the IEPS set the stage for the adoption of entrepreneurial strategies, it was largely through the choices of frontline staff that those policy choices were made material in the lives of project beneficiaries.

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In some ways, the indirect importation of entrepreneurial logics into the PSE aligns with Lea's (2020) recent work on Indigenous policy in Australia. Lea argues that policy is influenced by far too many factors to ever be thoroughly analysed. At the same time, it has too many consequences to ever be properly documented. Rather than being imposed from above, Lea (2020, 15) shows how policy "unfurls as a series of project stutters, misdirects, and meanderings". She also demonstrates how the ghosts of previous decisions taken and long since forgotten can still come back to haunt contemporary policy realisation. There will never be a comprehensive picture of a policy process, even a critical one. Nevertheless, despite the myriad of chaotic influences on policy realisation, it does not mean we as anthropologists should simply give up on policy analysis. Instead, by highlighting how frontline bureaucrats bring their own lives with them into their work, the wild nature of policy (Lea 2020) highlights the importance of ethnographic analysis and suggests future directions for anthropological research.

The Future

One of the many projects I followed during my time in Ecuador provides both an example of the rhythms with which precarious bureaucracies operate and a summary of the current situation of the IEPS since I have left. It also hints at some potential directions for future research. The project was an attempt to create specific branding for PSE products. Unusual among those I followed, the proposal was driven more by the national level of the IEPS than any of the regional offices. The exact details of what the branding would entail were never settled while I was there. Essentially, the IEPS wanted to register a logo that official PSE organisations could put on their products. It was not supposed to be a formal certification process, instead being available to all formally registered PSE producers. The institute did want to make it so that unregistered groups would not be allowed to use

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it, though questions of registration and enforcement were never settled during my time in Ecuador.

I found out about the proposal early on during my fieldwork and followed the intermittent bursts of energy as it got moved from one staff member's responsibility to another. Monse was the first to tell me about it, as she worked in the department of Intercambios y Mercados (Exchange and Markets) at the national level. Following up a few months later, she had passed off the responsibility to someone else in her team. A few months later, that person had left, and the project had been given to yet someone else from the department, Alejandra. Asking her about how the branding was going, she told me that it had stalled.

"It's still just on paper," she said, "but we're hoping to start again, because it's now got the backing of the vice-president."

Within months, the vice-president had resigned without a PSE logo ever being affixed to a product. It seemed that the PSE branding was stalled indefinitely.

Then, in mid-2019 while I was back in Australia, a burst of publicity from IEPS announced that the new branding "Somos EPS" (We are PSE) was being launched and was going to help "position" and "promote" the alternative economy. Chatting to one of my contacts almost a year later, I asked how the PSE branding was going. She said that it had not really gone anywhere. It was just a logo for organisations who participated in Hilando el Desarrollo—the most famous and longest running PSE procurement program—to stick on their products. Nothing else appeared for a while until another burst of activity in early 2021—after the election, but before Lasso had taken office. This time, the publicity appeared to indicate that the IEPS was about to approve the logo for products that were aimed at the public market, rather than those for government procurement programs

During my fieldwork, conversations around the PSE branding had quietly bubbled along in the background, not just in the national team (who were in charge of instituting it) but among the local

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offices as well. Informal discussion largely reflected the wider concerns of my interlocutors throughout this thesis. For example, a topic commonly returned to was whether the branding should be a certification of quality or just a logo for identification. Some staff thought the former would be better, as it would help the public associate the PSE with quality and would potentially raise the prices producers could ask for their products. Others worried about the exclusivity of certification. Between the cost borne by organisations and the certification process itself, they feared that many or even most PSE organisations would miss out. Instead, they thought the logo should simply be available for use by any registered PSE organisation. For them, simply being a part of the PSE ought to add some sort of value in the eyes of consumers.

As a project literally focused on making the PSE more visible, the branding project is an excellent example of much of the work done by the IEPS. As mentioned previously, since I left Ecuador, according to my contacts with *nombramiento* (a permanent position), the IEPS appears to be continuing to putter along at its stop-start pace. Just as the logo appeared to experience bursts of activity amid longer doldrums, from afar, the IEPS appears to have experienced bursts of success amid, I assume, much of the work of articulation described throughout this thesis—work that dominates the time of IEPS staff but does not create much in the way of artifacts that can be witnessed from outside the country. Beyond this activity, the current situation of the IEPS—and by extension the PSE branding—appears to be holding steady in a precarious balance. Despite the election of right-wing Guillermo Lasso, Pachakutik—a party formed in large part from the same Indigenous political movements that led the protests of the 1990s and early 2000s—holds the presidency of the National Assembly. Although the IEPS is largely part of the Correa legacy, it cannot be dissolved without approval by the Assembly.

Even so, the IEPS does not appear to have any close political allies in the National Assembly to

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garner further resources. This stalemate means that, rather than asking about hypothetical future political coalitions, it is more productive to consider what the PSE is and could be under a right-wing government. As discussed throughout this thesis, much of the underlying political and economic logic of the PSE does not contradict neoliberal entrepreneurialism and often even compliments it. The fact that the legal definition of the PSE places numerous social ideals ahead of “profit and the accumulation of capital” (Asamblea Nacional 2018) may make it seem as if it were antithetical to neoliberal ideals of unrestrained markets, the withdrawal of the state, and the prioritisation of production as recognised in monetary value. However, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, the emphasis of PSE proponents on the need to disrupt the status quo and the unreliability of the state means that the alternative economy sits somewhat comfortably beside wider discourses on entrepreneurialism.

There are even precedents for right-wing governments finding worthwhile reasons to support solidarity economic projects. During my time in Ecuador, the IEPS was engaged in a program of mutual training with Argentina’s National Institute of Associativity (*Asociativismo*) and Social Economy—an organisation with responsibilities loosely equivalent to the IEPS and the Superintendency of the PSE. Despite the election of right-wing Macri, the institute enjoyed continued support—at least enough to fly members to Ecuador for several days of workshops. With the return of the Peronists to power in 2019, the institute continues its work.

Following Maurer (2005, 2013), the solidarity economy projects of both countries oscillate through periods in which proponents emphasise their alterity and their integration. The extent to which the political situation in Ecuador will push for IEPS staff to emphasise the PSE’s connection to the mainstream economy is still to be seen. Just as the extent to which the PSE will remain discordant from wider entrepreneurial logics can only be assessed over time. Or to borrow from the

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words of Cabot (2016), whether the IEPS can sustain a partial alternative world within an intolerable system is an ongoing question. This question of the ability to sustain economic alternatives amidst government bureaucracy also suggests several avenues for future research.

Firstly, as documented throughout the thesis, as entrepreneurialism has continued to be more valorised in large segments of society, its logics appear to be further encroaching into government bureaucracy. In many countries where services have been outsourced and where bureaucracies appear to be hiring ever greater numbers of consultants and other temporary staff, entrepreneurial strategies for piecing together livelihoods appear to intersect with government service delivery. There is an ever-growing literature on the effects of fiscal austerity on government bureaucracy (Bear 2015; Bear and Mathur 2015; Forbess 2022; Koch and James 2022). Most accounts to date, however, have focused on the professional lives of government functionaries and sometimes on how they intersect with their private lives. Linked to the rise of side hustles, there are further questions to be answered about how the experience of entrepreneurialism inflects the work of contemporary government employees. Just as Elyachar (2013) highlights how even the work and lifeworld of “the lowliest research assistant” (herself) was enmeshed in major historical policy reform, the spread of entrepreneurial logics suggests we question their effects on policy realisation, not only through the assumptions of higher-level policy makers but also frontline staff.

The influence of entrepreneurialism among bureaucrats has significance far beyond Ecuador, however. There is a large movement in Silicon Valley, for example, that advocates for digital health products to “put technology in the hands of consumers and [empower] them to be powerful agents in their own health trajectories” (Geiger 2020, 174). Such logics could profoundly shift the government provision of healthcare, even if they were solely adopted by frontline staff and not officially adopted

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as policy. Other models of social service provision, such as housing and education, can also potentially be greatly ‘disrupted’ by the entrepreneurial perspectives of frontline government functionaries.

A second avenue of research relates to ‘side hustles’ themselves. The concept of the ‘side hustle’ appears to be spreading exponentially through middle-class circles globally. Consequently, there is an urgent necessity for more research into what the need to constantly be hustling means, beyond a bit of extra income. There is extensive research on diverse income strategies for poorer households, especially in agricultural regions; however, the modern call to “never stop hustling”⁹² appears to be a middle to upper-class phenomenon.⁹³ Earlier work on entrepreneurialism has emphasised its role as a form of self-making (Freeman 2014; Gershon 2014, 2016; Sopranzetti 2017; Win 2014), but this has largely been from the perspective of those whose entrepreneurial enterprise is also their primary livelihood. In comparison, there now appears to be a near endless supply of blog posts with titles such as “11 Best Side Hustle Ideas to Make an Extra \$1,000 a Month” (Martins Ferreira 2022). That particular one comes from a blog hosted by Oberlo, a business dedicated to helping people with ‘drop shipping’—microenterprises where orders are accepted and then immediately passed on to third-party suppliers (e.g., creating T-shirt designs that you sell online, but for which you never handle either the T-shirts themselves or the printing). The slogan of Oberlo is literally “Where self made is made”. Anecdotally, the rise of the side hustle appears to have gone hand-in-hand with renewed pressure for

⁹² For example, see: Mitchell (2017) and Scudamore (2018).

⁹³ Part of this is undoubtedly because these side projects are not considered to be essential to the livelihoods of the middle and upper classes, while working multiple casual jobs interspersed with “gigs” is rapidly becoming the norm for poorer sections of Western societies. While the wealthy ‘hustle’, the poor merely hustle.

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hobbies to be socially validated through monetisation.⁹⁴ Currently, the phenomenon appears to have been largely explored through long-format journalism, hinting at the need for greater ethnographic attention for the role of side hustles and ‘hustling’ in the formation of the modern middle-class professional.⁹⁵

Finally, there is still need to examine non- and even anti-neoliberal policy, particularly with an eye to parallels with perceived neoliberal policy. There have been many warnings in anthropology against using ‘neoliberal’ as an imprecise synonym for inequality and capitalism broadly (Ferguson 1994; D. Harvey 2005; Kipnis 2008; Lea 2021; Trnka and Trundle 2014). Similarly, as highlighted by Kipnis (2008) in relation to audit cultures, while a particular phenomenon might be highly associated with neoliberalism due to contemporary co-occurrence, a careful examination of other contexts might bring the correlation into question. In the case of Kipnis, his interlocutors traced a history of audit cultures in China from its communist history rather than a recent neoliberal imposition. This suggests that audits, rather than being a neoliberal technology, are the result of a wider modern phenomenon.

In the case of my thesis, the emphasis placed by many of my interlocutors on affect and morality, alongside a focus on the mentality of the individual, aligns with the findings of other anthropologists examining both anti-neoliberal spaces⁹⁶ and entrepreneurial neoliberal ones (Freeman 2014, 2020; Sopranzetti 2017). This potentially suggests that the emotive aspects of entrepreneurialism,

⁹⁴ For an excellent personal account of these pressures, see a Vox article by Bull (2021).

⁹⁵ See also: Conway (2019).

⁹⁶ See: Cabot (2016) and Rakopoulos (2015). Also, despite framing her analysis through the concept of the “moral neoliberal”, Muelebach’s (2012) examination of anti-neoliberal activists and their attraction to the “warmth” of volunteering and other neoliberal forms of care also aligns with these observations.

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often laid at the feet of neoliberalism, are perhaps part of a broader trend of people wanting a way to combat modern forms of alienation that extend beyond modern neoliberalism. Substantially more research is necessary, however, to more accurately trace reactions to modern alienation.

Beyond all of this, and outside of the scope of a doctoral thesis, is the evaluative question of what ‘works’. Gibson-Graham (2008, 618) remind us that an academic stance “tinged with skepticism and negativity” is “not a particularly nurturing environment for hopeful, inchoate experiments”. ‘Works’ is, of course, an incredibly loaded term. What counts as ‘working’? And ‘works’ for whom? Nevertheless, for those of us who consider ourselves engaged anthropologists who wish to see change in the world, simple critique is insufficient. Otherwise, as again highlighted by Gibson-Graham (2008, 618), “new economies are likely to be dismissed as capitalism in another guise or always already coopted”.

In this thesis I have argued strongly for the importance of mid-level bureaucrats in shaping policy realisation, largely through tracing the influences of precarity on their lives and work. At the same time, especially as addressed in Chapter Six, it was also the passion of IEPS staff for a different kind of economy, one that was hopefully more egalitarian, that maintained the PSE as a potential realm of the alternative in a context in which the pressures from the wider economy were potentially overwhelming. Importantly, this was not due to their forming some sort of heroic last stand against neoliberalism. Many staff, especially those that were able to express themselves through their side hustles, passionately enjoyed their work and felt they were doing something important, albeit under challenging circumstances. Several anthropologists have recently reminded us as a discipline to also pay attention to the pleasures of government work (Billaud and Cowan 2020; Cooper 2019; Cowan 2020; Lea 2021). After all, if the entrepreneurialisation of bureaucracy is driven in large part through the perceptions and aspirations of bureaucrats themselves, it is also their perceptions and aspirations

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toward concepts such as “the public good”⁹⁷ that holds the potential hope of restructuring government services and welfare in favour of the disenfranchised.

As highlighted by Ferguson (2009) over a decade ago, social technologies are not beholden to the political ideologies that gave rise to them. If the same statistical tools of risk pooling can both help create the democratic welfare state and also become central to the expansion of financial capital into the lives of the global poor, there is no reason to think that social technologies born from entrepreneurialism cannot be put to other social ends. Government bureaucrats are central to any such attempts to make entrepreneurial strategies and ventures serve other social purposes. Researchers, too, have an important role to play in studying the multiple social and technological entanglements of policy and their results, with a hopeful eye to what threads may be useful for future endeavours. If policy makers, activists, and even the general public all appear to see an appeal in the affective structures of entrepreneurialism, it suggests that simply dismissing any entrepreneurial venture as neoliberal misses some opportunity that is more felt than directly perceived by these divergent groups. If alternative economies are supposed to be based on more than rational calculation, acknowledging these affective appeals is essential to any future projects.

Current neoliberal economic trends will not be disrupted due to perfectly designed policy frameworks or careful bureaucratic administration. They will be disrupted if and when alternative economic logics connect the hopes and desires of many for more equitable relations to the economic needs of the time. Whether that will occur is, of course, not an inevitability. However, for those of us hoping to see change, building a toolkit of diverse economic logics ready to be pressed into service

⁹⁷ See: Bear and Mathur (2015) and Billaud and Cowan (2020).

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when an opportunity arrives is incredibly important, even if those logics have neoliberal origins. After all, in the words of my IEPS interlocutors, *tienes que aprovechar las oportunidades*.

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