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Fair care? How Ecuadorian women negotiate childcare in fair trade flower production☆



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SYNOPSIS

Ethical trade initiatives are one strategy to alleviate the exploitative tendencies of capitalist production for workers in the Global South, but to what extent these initiatives support care is an open question. This study uses qualitative interviews with 38 women workers with children to examine their perspectives about employment and care at a fair trade certified rose farm in Ecuador. Women described generally good working conditions, but highlighted their job's long hours, low pay, and inadequate childcare. Their job necessitated that they organized private “gendered economic strategies” (Casanova, 2011) for securing childcare—strategies which allowed them to provide financial support for their children, but which strained their ability to fulfill gendered expectations about care. Despite its benefits, I argue that fair trade provides insufficient support for care in its standards and production structures. In this case, it falls short of facilitating care arrangements that would further development.

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The global crisis of care (Bedford, 2010; Esplen, 2009; Herrera, 2012) is increasingly recognized as a key and understudied facet of gender equality and human development in the Global South (Esplen, 2009; Esquivel, 2011; Friedemann-Sánchez & Griffin, 2011; Razavi & Staab, 2012). Do ethical trade initiatives, which are infusing more socially and environmentally responsible practices into global production, have potential for alleviating this crisis? While critics of ethical trade question whether the market can effectively provide workers' social welfare and development more broadly (Dolan, 2005; Rice, 2009; Riisgaard, 2007) and highlight its exclusion of informal and reproductive workers, the majority of whom are women (Barrientos, 2010; Barrientos, Dolan, & Tallontire, 2003), there has been little attention to care in the context of ethical trade. How do women who are protected by ethical trade policies fair in the realm of care?

Through a case study of Nevado Roses, a fair trade certified farm in Ecuador, this article examines ethical trade's potential for supporting women workers' gendered responsibilities to care, concluding that it leaves much to be desired. Based on interviews with thirty-eight women workers with children, I find that mothers create individual private “gendered economic strategies” (Casanova, 2011, 4) to manage childcare and work conditions at Nevado Roses. These strategies reflect material conditions, gender norms, and future aspirations, and demonstrate the inadequacies of privatized care arrangements occurring alongside fair trade production. At Nevado Roses, ethical production practices under fair trade, though they provide many benefits that advance social welfare and gender equality in the workplace, also

perpetuate unjust labor conditions for women by failing to sufficiently support or challenge their gendered roles as primary caregivers. A “key input into the process of economic, social and human development” (Razavi & Staab, 2012, 21), care must garner more attention and support if trade is to be sustainable or ethical.

Care and ethical trade in the Global South

Despite the centrality of care to human life and development, and its current state of crisis, there is relatively little research on care in the Global South (Esplen, 2009; Friedemann-Sánchez & Griffin, 2011; Razavi & Staab, 2012). Care includes “the activities and relations involved in meeting the physical and emotional needs of dependent adults and children, and the normative, economic and social frameworks within which these are distributed and carried out” (Daly & Lewis, 2000, 285). This definition includes “indirect care” (Folbre, 2006) activities such as domestic work. Like relational care, indirect care is laden with gender inequality; its low commodification in low-income Global South communities means it is time intensive and affects other forms of care and employment (Esquivel, 2011; Razavi & Staab, 2012). Though care involves everyone (Williams, 2001), I focus on employed women's perspectives on caring for their children.

One frame of analysis for this group, typically grounded in formal employment contexts of the Global North, is mothering. Contemporary studies find that employed mothers' realities and views on mothering challenge the time intensive and emotionally engrossing ideal of “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996). Single mothers who must work (Christopher, 2012) and women of color who draw on larger community for raising children (Collins, 2000) feel particularly less accountable to intensive mothering. More women view employment as part of

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mothering (Garey, 1999), long evident in women of color's experiences (Collins, 2000). Current research, in fact, shows that mothers—in response to material, temporal, and spatial constraints—rely on “extensive” or delegatory mothering (Christopher, 2012) and “transnational mothering” (Herrera, 2010) that enable them to orchestrate caring arrangements without direct oversight.

These studies show how the provision of childcare is commonly an individual and gendered act of organizing care alongside other types of labor, concurring with findings from Ecuador. For example, Ecuadorian women managing small businesses in the midst of economic crisis that necessitated additional income-generating activities, took pride in their ability to perform “miracles” by providing care despite limited resources (Pitkin & Bedoya, 1997). Casanova (2011) highlighted comparable sentiments among Ecuadorian women in direct sales, a relatively flexible form of employment promoted to women workers with families. These women were redefining motherhood to include paid work and were proud of how their incomes helped their families (170). To explain how they managed their expanded responsibilities related to work and family, they often used the phrase, “It's all about organizing yourself” (*Es cuestión de organizarse*) (Casanova, 2011, 35).

Women workers in the Global South have many ways of organizing care and employment. Often, they rely on other underpaid and under resourced women (Casanova, 2011) inside (Dreby, 2010; Herrera, 2012) and outside (Talcott, 2004) the family. In some cases, mothers leave children at home alone (Korovkin, 2003; Moser, 1993; Vandegrift, 2008). These strategies and the “success” of organizing, as well as job satisfaction, depend on children's age (Casanova, 2011). The presence of daughters in the household is also an important factor. Though they can lessen mothers' care burdens, this solution negatively affects daughters' educational opportunities and perpetuates gender inequality (Herrera, 2012; Moser, 1993; Pitkin & Bedoya, 1997).

Undergirding women's “organizing,” Casanova argues, are “gendered economic strategies.” Gendered economic strategies “take into account not only the dominant cultural narratives of gender [as Hochschild's “gender strategy” ([1989] 2003) does] but also the concrete socioeconomic situations in which individuals, couples, and families find themselves” (Casanova, 2011, 4). They inform how women organize employment and care. This concept integrates scholarship on mothering ideals and practices (described above) with attention to material realities that are crucial for understanding women's experiences in the Global South, where poverty conditions have profound effects on care (Bedford, 2010). Most importantly, gendered economic strategies, though necessary for survival, also—when used to achieve miracles or organize oneself—sustain the belief that gendered responsibilities in work-family balance are individual duties rather than structural inequalities (Casanova, 2011).¹

Gender and development policy encourages this privatized, individual care. The World Bank's lauding of a thirty-minute increase in men's housework² in the Ecuadorian flower industry (Newman, 2002) is one example (Bedford, 2009). Promoting increased care by poor men as a route to gender equality encourages not only household provision of care; it assumes heterosexual nuclear family arrangements (Bedford, 2009), an assumption all too common in development theory and practice (Lind & Share, 2003). This privatized heteronormative policy model, also evident in United Nations policy on women and care (Bedford, 2010), highlights the World Bank's inattention to local contexts and lived realities of women workers, many of whom, in the case of Ecuador, live alone or in extended family arrangements (Bedford, 2009; Deere, 2005).

This inattention to women's lived experience that characterizes development policy (Bhavnani & Bywater, 2009) is also evident in ethical trade models of development (Rice, 2009), which make private businesses the providers of economic growth, social welfare, and labor rights (Dolan, 2005). Much of the small³ strand of ethical trade research that examines gender does so from a policy level, rather than from an individual or lived experience level of women workers (See Dolan &

Sutherland, 2002 for an exception). It highlights that informal and reproductive work—areas of labor where women are most concentrated and where gender-sensitive standards could most support women workers—remain outside the coverage of labor legislation (Barrientos et al., 2003). This structure therefore excludes most women from the benefits of ethical standards (Barrientos, 2010; Barrientos et al., 2003; Tallontire, Dolan, Smith, & Barrientos, 2005). When ethical standards do reach women, the retailer driven (Riisgaard, 2007) and specialist regulated (Korovkin & Sanmiguel-Valderrama, 2007) organization of ethical trade means standards have more influence on “visible” issues (health and safety) than “nonvisible” (discrimination and freedom of association) (Barrientos, 2010; Sanmiguel-Valderrama, 2011; Wright & Madrid, 2007) or gender specific issues such as women's representation on worker's committees and childcare (Barrientos, 2010).

Fair trade does not transcend a focus on productive labor, but does address some of the weak social and gender policies in other ethical initiatives.⁴ Requiring annual and surprise third party audits, fair trade guarantees workers' rights to unionize and, where unions are absent, establishes workers' committees. It mandates equal pay, proportional representation on workers' and fair trade committees, freedom from discrimination based on pregnancy, maternity leave, and nursing, three weeks⁵ of paid leave, and community projects paid for by the fair trade committee managed fair trade premium (equal to 10% of fair trade sales).⁶ Fair trade certification of Ecuadorian flower farms ensures social and environmental labor conditions exceed legal and industry norms, and contributes to worker empowerment through fair trade workers' committees (Raynolds, 2012). Fair trade, then, may be improving women's policy issues under ethical trade, but because of the focus in previous research on regulatory structures, there is virtually no knowledge of how mothers negotiate childcare in any ethical trade setting.

Drawing on in-depth interviews, I employ gendered economic strategies as a framework to analyze how cultural notions about gender—common in scholarship on mothers, care, and employment—and material conditions—vital for contexts of the Global South—inform the organization of childcare by women who choose to work in fair trade flowers. I examine women's different privatized care arrangements to highlight the necessity for structural solutions to the provision of care and the organization of production.

Ecuador

Ecuadorian fair trade floriculture offers stable and gender-equal wage opportunities for workers with low education levels in a context where women are concentrated in self-employment, informal labor, and unemployment (Camacho, 2010). With 2012 labor participation rates of 54.4% (World Bank, 2014a), Ecuadorian women receive only 62%, on average, of men's wages (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2012). In rural areas, increasing labor participation, combined with higher-than-average wage gaps (Camacho, 2010), has led to the feminization of non-traditional, development policy supported agro-export sectors, like floriculture (Deere, 2005). This process has not changed the fact that Ecuadorian women are expected to, and do provide nearly all care (Esquivel, 2011; Herrera, 2003). Gender norms in Ecuador prioritize women's roles as mothers and individuals naturally tied to the home (Lind, 2005), ideologies that act “as markers pointing to the correct place for women as territorially fixed and responsible for the reproduction of cultures and families” (Herrera, 2010, 57).

Ecuadorian policy supports care at the national level with twelve weeks of maternity leave—25% of which comes from employers, and 75% of which comes from social insurance—and by requiring enterprises with 50 or more employees to provide childcare (ILO, 2014). Little enforcement of childcare provisioning is in place, however (Herrera, 2003). In 2006, mothers were the primary care providers for 76.5% of children (INEC, 2006).

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