

Telling Stories in Order to Live:  
Narratives on Danger and Modernity in a Quito Market

An honors thesis for the Department of Anthropology

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## Abstract

Camal, a large municipal market in Quito, Ecuador, is widely considered by residents as a “dangerous” place, yet fewer crimes actually occur there than elsewhere in the city. During ten weeks of ethnographic fieldwork at the market in 2013, I attempted to understand the gap between popular discourse and reality when it came to “danger” at Camal. Drawing on anthropological theories about the informal economy, globalization, and insecurity, this thesis proposes that concerns about danger reflect more complicated perceptions of race and modernity that are being given a new gloss as Ecuador becomes more involved in globalized capitalism. Chapter One sketches the history of Ecuador from the pre-Colombian era to the present, with a particular focus on how imaginaries of race and modernity have shaped the nation. Chapter Two is a spatial exploration of Quito’s markets and the city’s distinctive North-South geographic orientation, showing how notions of race have influenced the placement and perception of markets. In Chapter Three, I examine discourse about the market and argue that many Quiteños fear Camal’s clearly hybridized form of exchange and relatively undisciplined space, which challenge seemingly stable racialized categories in a city felt to be insecure in general. Chapter Four is dedicated to the vendors’ behaviors and their own stories about the market. Using as a starting-point Cindi Katz’s categories of resilience, reworking, and resistance, the chapter shows how the global and the local produce one another on many levels, while simultaneously creating “excesses” that cannot fully be captured through any single analytical lens. I conclude with a brief discussion of positionality and a rationale for producing ethnographic knowledge even in the absence of definitive conclusions.

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“We tell ourselves stories in order to live... We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely... by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria — which is our actual experience.”  
-Joan Didion, *The White Album* (1979)

## **Introduction**

### **Welcome to the Market**

It felt like a dream the first time I visited the Camal market in Quito, Ecuador. Not a metaphorical dream, but the kind you have at night, and wake up from feeling disoriented. The aisles at Camal seemed to go on forever, blend into each other, and then fizzle out into dead ends and abandoned corridors. I passed the produce section, but then here was another one, and then later, more piled-high bananas, another small mountain range of plantains. The market was a language I did not understand, it did not “make sense” to me. And yet, everything was so real: the jostling shoppers, and all of the vendors, mostly women, perched beside their wares: some with small smiles, a few with quizzical stares. The blackberries, stacked high in wicker baskets. The meat sections, replete with stray baby chicks and stacks of pigs’ heads: I inhaled the stale perfume of slaughter.

Camal is a large municipal market with over 2000 vendors, most of whom have stalls within a rambling, warehouse-like building or on the surrounding outdoor patio areas. The word *camal* means “slaughterhouse” in Spanish, because the market is located on a site that housed the municipal slaughterhouse for much of the twentieth century. Over time, Camal was converted into one of the city’s largest markets. Today about half of the vendors at Camal sell fruits and vegetables, while others sell dry goods, raw meat, clothing, household appliances, and cell phones. There are four municipal administrators who are charged with monitoring and creating order at Camal, but the leaders of Camal’s thirteen vendors’ associations also exert varying degrees of power over the space. Members pay dues to their associations, which are used to hire security guards, financially support members faced with illness or family crises, and fund minor infrastructure projects. Camal is just a few miles south of the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Quito’s historical center, which is a very popular tourist destination. However, Camal is well

off the beaten track for tourists because it is in South Quito, which historically has been a working-class section of the city. Lonely Planet advises foreigners to steer clear of South Quito altogether, because it is dangerous and there is “little to see” (Burningham et al 2009). However, Camal is very well known among Quito’s residents (often referred to as Quiteños). In 1995 a shopping mall, called the Recreo, opened across the street from Camal. Today Recreo is one of the most popular malls in Quito and has expanded to include a supersized grocery store, Megamaxi, which seems to pose competition for Camal.

In terms of demographics, about half of the market’s vendors were born in or around Quito, while the other half migrated to the capital mostly from Andean provinces. In other Andean cities such as Cochabamba, Cuenca, or Cusco, vendors often wear distinctive skirts and bowler hats that identify them as racially-ambiguous, politically-active market *cholas* (Albro 2000; Weismantel 2001; Seligmann 1989). However in Quito the word *chola* is rarely used, and Camal’s vendors mostly dressed like anyone else except for perhaps a colorful smock and a small, puffy hat identifying their vendors’ associations. About a quarter of vendors wore clothing that identified them as indigenous and had learned *Kichwa* as their first language. Like anthropologist Mary Weismantel, who has written extensively about Andean markets, I found that “the more time I spent looking at market women across the highlands of Ecuador and the Andes, the more I realized that this group of people shared only one physical characteristic: heterogeneity” (2001: 92). Some vendors with dark brown skin identified as *mestizas* whose families had lived in Quito for generations, while some lighter-skinned vendors described themselves as indigenous. In short, vendors at Camal were diverse yet essentially indistinguishable in appearance from the rest of Quito’s working-class population.

My own bewildering first experience at Camal occurred in June of 2011, when I was an

international volunteer at the non-profit *Centro de la Niña Trabajadora* (CENIT) in South Quito. CENIT is a small Catholic charity that provides education and other social services for families who work in and around Camal. While most of the staff is comprised of Latin American nuns and Ecuadorian teachers and social workers, CENIT also accepts international volunteers for long-term placements.

About seven years ago, when we were both in high school, my best friend Julie and I started scheming to take a big trip to Latin America. We got part-time jobs, hoarded babysitting money, and watched the *Motorcycle Diaries* too many times. The summer after our freshman year of college, we bought plane tickets to Ecuador, rented an apartment in Quito, and arranged to volunteer at CENIT for two months. We were ambivalent about “voluntourism,” but weren’t sure what else to do. This uncertainty associated with our positionality – young, well-educated, U.S. American white women who love learning in Latin America- has been part of all our experiences in Ecuador.

CENIT is located a few blocks from Camal, within a lumbering fortress of concrete and faded pastel paint. During my time there, I helped out at the preschool CENIT ran for vendors’ children at small meeting hall inside the market. However my primary role was assisting an Ecuadorian lawyer who did pro-bono cases for vendors, usually involving child support and domestic abuse. The lawyer, Marcos, was just shy of thirty years old. He was short in stature, and had a strong jawbone and the type of smile that suggested he had inside information. When he walked into CENIT’s office in his jewel-toned oxford shirts and sunglasses, nuns seemed to gravitate towards him. Marcos was warm to the nuns and polite to his pro-bono clients from Camal, but in general he was disdainful of Ecuadorian women. He only dated North Americans and Europeans (including several women he met while they were volunteering at CENIT). Once,

just after a new client had left our makeshift office, Marcos said, “We will never hear from that woman again. Some these women are lying to us. These women don’t know what they want.”

Marcos seemed to view the vendors as hapless at best, conniving at worst.

Marcos’ opinion of Camal’s vendors was not unusual among the Quiteños I encountered. As anthropologists Mary Weismantel and Linda Seligmann have already convincingly argued, many people across the Andes feel a deep ambivalence towards markets and market vendors. As Weismantel notes:

Produce markets open up a space in the middle of urban life that is appealingly rustic and agricultural, but also dirty and dangerous. Its unruly appearance and organic nature offers an obvious contrast—even a welcome relief—from the concrete and steel grid ...but by the same token, the people and products of the market seem out of step with modern city life, an anachronism that is inevitably interpreted in racial terms. (2001:19)

Understanding how vendors are “interpreted in racial terms” requires a few preliminary insights into Andean racial politics, which I gleaned primarily from Weismantel’s book *Cholas and Pistachos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes*. There are two commonly used racial categories in Ecuador. The first, *indio* or Indian, has been replaced in most popular discourse by the less derogatory term *indigena* (indigenous). This shift in language does not necessarily imply a decrease in racism. Rather, “racial terminology builds up around the social breach like layers of old scabs and new seepages over an unhealed wound...each polite euphemism becomes tainted with the same derogatory meanings that infected the old one” (Weismantel 2001: xxxviii). The other category is *mestizo*, which many Ecuadorians explained to me as meaning people of mixed indigenous and European descent. Most people in Ecuador label themselves *mestizos*. There is also a small oligarchy that considers themselves to be of entirely European origin, but they typically call themselves *la gente decente* (“the decent people”) rather than *blancos* or “whites” (Weismantel 2001: xxxviii).



Once, during an attempt to explain Ecuadorian society to me, Marcos the lawyer referred to himself as *mestizo*. He never used racial terminology to describe our clients, but I sensed racial undertones in his attitude towards them. Throughout the Andes, market women have historically been stigmatized for straddling racial binaries because of their perceived roles as interlocutors between rural indigenous producers and urban *mestizo* consumers (Seligmann 1989: 698). Today, market vendors are often seen as crossing the binaries that form the bedrock of Andean society, including race but also the related divisions of gender and sexuality. Vendors in Quito and throughout the Andes are almost always women who run their own businesses and are unafraid to negotiate. They transcend the private sphere and instead make themselves prominently at home in public space. I once asked the president of one of Camal's largest vendors' associations, a successful butcher named Juan, why almost all of the vendors were women. He explained to me that "ninety or ninety-five percent of vendors are women because women are more advanced, more responsible. They are struggling here to advance their children. Women are fighting a big fight." Juan's association was named *8 de marzo*, a reference to International Women's Day. Marcos, however, did not see vendors through the figure of the suffering-yet-powerful matriarch. It was more as if he looked upon them as dirt, or "matter out of place" in his professional lifestyle.

Marcos only came to CENIT for few hours each week, so my job was to do preliminary interviews with clients, organize their paperwork, and schedule their legal consultations with Marcos. And while I was skeptical of Marcos' opinion of the vendors, I found our clients hard to read (perhaps this was because I was a white stranger to whom they had to explain their personal problems before they could meet with the real lawyer). Our clients' personalities seemed to get lost in translation across the power lines of nationality, ethnicity and language.

The market felt like a storyline that I could not follow. My Spanish was mediocre, and every day at Camal was strange and overwhelming. Though I walked through the market daily, I never got my bearings. I often found myself lost and anxiously wandering through aisles that felt like a labyrinth. Sometimes vendors came to see Marcos and told us heart-wrenching stories of poverty and absent husbands, but then never showed up to our next meeting. Where did they go? One morning I arrived at the preschool with an Ecuadorian staff member only to discover the enormous, fresh carcass of a pig on the floor of the classroom. Several weeks later, I was sweeping the classroom when I discovered one of the pig's ears underneath a bench. And most disconcertingly, nearly every Quiteño we met emphatically warned my friend Julie and me that Camal was dangerous, and that we had no business going there.

We left Ecuador, but Camal was still on my mind. Over the next two years, I did academic research to learn as much as I could about markets like Camal. My access to the incredible resources of Tufts University eventually enabled me to follow my curiosity back to Ecuador. In 2013 I received a Tufts Bendetson Summer Scholar research grant to do nine weeks of ethnographic fieldwork at Camal. Julie and I once again were spending the summer together in Ecuador, though she was interviewing vendors in several of Quito's markets for an unrelated project about reproductive healthcare.

During the first few weeks of fieldwork I mostly wandered the market, making small purchases and smiling nervously at everyone. When I told vendors I was writing a thesis about the lives of the women who work at Camal, most of them responded with curiosity and enthusiasm. Several vendors started inviting me to sit with them in their stalls and began introducing me to their friends. I spent the majority of my fieldwork "just hanging out" with vendors, shelling peas and listening to their conversations as they waited for customers. Like

many anthropologists before me, I often felt like a semi-professional eavesdropper, and yet as so often happens during fieldwork, many people at the market generously folded me into their community. Vendors were constantly giving me gifts: a special type of orange, or a small knickknack. In return, every few weeks I baked chocolate chip cookies to share. A few vendors and I became quite close, and I hung out with their young adult children on the weekends or helped their small children with their English homework.

The mostly very warm welcome I received at the market likely had something to do with my race and nationality. As I delve into further in the next chapter, *blanquemento*, or the “whitening” of a population as a project to improve society, continues to have a strong hold in Ecuador. I began carrying around a photo of my boyfriend to clarify that regardless of whether a vendor talked to me, I would not go on a date with any of her sons. Many vendors were very curious about my life in the United States. Other vendors, like Maria and her niece Isabella, were more interested in making fun of me. Maria and Isabella had both migrated to Quito from a rural Andean province. They spoke Kichwa with each other, and identified with their indigenous community through their clothes and red beaded jewelry. Early in my fieldwork, Maria asked me where I was from after I bought a tomato from her. When I responded that I was from the United States, she nodded and explained that she already had a friend from there, a volunteer from CENIT. But Maria had something else she wanted to ask me: “Why is your hair so short?” She explained that when I first walked by, she and Isabella were not sure whether I was a man or a woman because I was so thin and my hair was so strange. They both laughed, and Maria suggested that I start wearing earrings. I figured at least we were connecting.

Other vendors whom I did not know well often asked questions I instinctively deflected, such as “How big is your house?” or “Is your university free?” Many women at Camal asked me

to bring them photos of my family and my house in the United States. I once showed a vendor a photo of my sister and me that I considered to be particularly sweet, but the woman was instead transfixed by what was in the background: the relatively posh living room of my family's home in Maryland. Our interactions were an exchange, but there was an underlying tension to the fact that they were working at the market to support their families while I was attempting to do ethnography for a fully funded school project.

I also did observational fieldwork and interviews outside of the market, which included many hours of "people watching" at the Recreo mall and Megamaxi grocery store across the street from Camal. Besides interviewing twenty-four vendors, I interviewed market customers and administrators, as well as community activists and municipal employees who worked in South Quito. I interviewed a former Peace Corps volunteer who had lived in South Quito, my middle or upper-class acquaintances who no longer shopped at markets like Camal, and an Ecuadorian staff member from CENIT. In total I recorded 38 interviews that ranged in length from ten minutes to about three hours.

The fact that I was an outsider was in some respects helpful, or at least led me to different conclusions than I might have reached if I was coming from within Ecuadorian society. Before beginning fieldwork I did a review of literature on Andean markets, neoliberal economic policies in South America and the current political situation in Ecuador. But once I was back in Quito, I still felt like I had no idea what was going on most of the time. Out of necessity I asked the dumbest and most obvious questions, and doing so illuminated fundamental ideas about the market that most people in Quito might take for granted. I was not a "blank slate" by any means, and I was oblivious to some key pieces of context due to language and cultural barriers. My lack of *Kichwa* skewed my research towards the *mestiza* or at least Spanish-speaking vendors. Still, I

brought a limited number of preconceptions to Camal, or perhaps more accurately, I brought a profound awareness of my own cluelessness. Many (though not all) of this project's "informants" also asked me a lot questions during our time together. They have not had the luxury of pondering my answers for the past several years, as I have pondered over theirs. But I would like to think that in the moment, they were at least entertained. The underlying ethos of my research method was "do no harm."

### Theoretical Orientation and Overview of Chapters

I had gone back to the market as a novice researcher in hopes of reaching some kind of understanding about Camal. I left Ecuador in 2013 with much more information, but no clear conclusions. Upon returning to the United States, I spent the remainder of 2013 and all of 2014 attempting to put together the puzzle pieces of my interview recordings and field notes with existing ethnographies. I became particularly interested in unpacking why almost all Quiteños I met during my fieldwork, regardless of their socio-economic status, told me that Camal was a dangerous place. Yet throughout both of my experiences at the market, I never witnessed or heard about any specific crimes. Something was not adding up.

Delving into anthropological theories about the informal economy, globalization, and insecurity gave me sharper focus as I sought to understand the gap between popular discourse and reality when it came to "danger" at Camal. Through her article "Rebuilding the Global City: Economy, Ethnicity, and Space," Saskia Sassen showed me how to unpack the *narratives* that surround Quito's informal economy (1993). Her examination of working-class uses of space in the United States challenged me to imagine the diverse ways that the space of Camal could be interpreted. I realized that a place that might feel dirty and dangerous to one person could feel clean and safe for someone else.

Pierre Bourdieu helped me understand how people's readings of Camal do not exist in a vacuum; rather, individuals' perceptions and preferences are imbued with power. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu argues that people assert their economic and social status via cultural preferences or "tastes." He unpacks cultural superiority by arguing that upper class "tastes of luxury" convey self-restraint, purity, and above all *discipline*. In the decades since Bourdieu wrote *Distinction*, the mass media has facilitated the emergence of an imagined global middle class with increasingly homogenous "tastes of luxury. The global middle class is mostly just an idea, a set of images circulated via billboards and *telenovelas*, but it is a powerful idea that people around the world live through in distinct ways. I used Bourdieu's "tastes of luxury" to think about how the imaginary of a global middle class works to make Camal's relatively unrestrained and undisciplined space unappealing to many Quiteños.

Through her writing on "supply-chain capitalism," Anna Tsing allowed me to see how Camal's vendors use their cultural identities to create viable economic niches within the long and often unstable global supply chains that feed into—and feed—Quito (2009). In the final chapter, I turn to Tsing for theory that leaves space for complexity beyond the cliché of all-powerful capitalist forces versus grassroots resistance. Tsing argues that "most of the best-known radical male critics of post-cold war capitalism work to find a singular structure that might form the basis of resistance and revolution, despite the lack of inspiring socialist alternatives" (2009: 151-152). Tsing inspired me to stop looking for a singular brand of "resistance" at the market, and to instead pay attention to the *particular* ways that Camal's vendors engaged with larger forces.

Finally, Erik Harms's book *Saigon's Edge* (2010) was invaluable as I grappled with Quito's ever-present binaries of North-South, *mestizo*-indigenous, and modernity-tradition. Quiteños constantly referred to these categories, and I knew they were important. At the same

time, these dualisms clearly did not adequately describe the city. Harms reminded me that “although ideal categories suffer descriptive deficiencies when faced with the elements of actual social life, they have tremendous staying power” (Harms 2010: 25). Through Harms I came to understand Camal as both a material place and a diverse set of ideas, images and perceptions that all Quiteños, including vendors, constantly negotiated with. The material Camal and the imagined Camals were constantly in flux, and they frequently collided. Harms showed me how to take the imagined Camals seriously, without fully believing in them.

By using theory to more fully unpack my experiences at Camal, a clearer picture began to emerge. Still, it wasn't until I started digging deeper into the history of Ecuador, and more specifically the history of Quito's markets, that an argument started to come together.

Accordingly, Chapter One sketches the history of Ecuador from the pre-Colombian era to the present political regime, with a particular focus on how imaginaries of race and modernity have shaped the nation. Chapter Two is about the history of Quito, with emphasis on how notions of race have shaped both markets and the city's distinctive North-South geographic orientation. Chapter Three digs into what makes Camal *feel* like an insecure space for many Quiteños. I argue that many Quiteños fear Camal's clearly hybridized form of exchange and relatively undisciplined space, which challenge seemingly stable categories in a city felt to be insecure in general. Chapter Four is dedicated to the vendors' behaviors and their own stories about the market. To protect their presence in Quito's economy and create positive identities for themselves, vendors use unique strategies that can be understood using the three categories of behavior identified by Cindi Katz in *Growing Up Global*: resilience, reworking, and resistance (2004). This approach centers on the vendors and their agency, and provides insight into the ways in which working-class people interact on the ground with a phenomenon as seemingly

massive as “globalization.” At the same time, the format of this chapter avoids funneling vendors’ diverse behaviors and perspectives into a singular, capital-R “Resistance” movement.

I will conclude with a brief statement about how my thesis is written, and why. To even begin to grasp human societies, ethnography inevitably involves a certain level of complexity. I use complicated theories because I want you to *think* profoundly about Camal. I also hope that this ethnography stays as “close to the ground” as possible; that is, I want you to see, smell, taste, and feel Camal. But no matter how many details I include, the market is still too excessive to be legible on the page (Raffles 2002). There are thousands of other potential stories about Camal lurking on the margins of these pages. There are stories I did not have space to include, as well as stories I never heard or did not understand. My thesis is a learning experience that has pushed me to my limits, but the richness of Camal is far from exhausted. Like the aisles that I got lost in so many times, this story feels like it could keep going and going and going.

Welcome to the market.



## Chapter One

### Introducing Ecuador: A History of Race, Colonialism, and Development

#### Pre-Colombian and Colonial History

Ecuador is a small coastal nation in South America nestled between Colombia and Peru. Though Ecuador is barely larger than the state of Oregon, it includes Andean highlands, Amazonian rainforest, a long Pacific coastline, and the Galapagos Islands. It appears that sedentary human settlement in Ecuador dates back to approximately 4000 BCE, and the region's peoples were engaged in long-distance trade as early as 3000 BCE (Bray 2008: 15). Some Ecuadorian groups later served as important trading links between the Mesoamerican and Incan civilizations (Bray 2008: 15). Still, until the Incas arrived, the region's chiefdoms had distinct languages and were relatively isolated from each other (de la Torre and Striffler 2008: 9).

The Incas faced formidable resistance when they attempted to expand into Ecuador in the late 1400s, and they never conquered the entire region (de la Torre and Striffler 2008: 9). The Incas rebuilt the present-day Ecuadorian capital of Quito in the image of their lowland capital of Cusco; "the idea apparently was to transpose the order of the heartland onto selected places throughout the entire domain" (D'Altroy 2014: 365). Quito was the northernmost point of an Incan road that spanned all the way to Mendoza, Argentina (D'Altroy 2014: 367). This Inca's impressive system of roads, coupled with a high level of internal organization and a complex tribute system, brought many Ecuadorian peoples partially into the cultural and economic folds of the Incan empire. Indeed, "the capacity of the Inca state to accumulate surpluses, sustain its empire, and redistribute surpluses through symbolic gestures of reciprocity to its subject population has challenged the Western imagination ever since" (Larson 1995: 9). Unlike in Mesoamerica, there were no great marketplaces in the Andes prior to the Conquest (Larson

1995: 9). Ecuadorian markets emerged after the Conquest, and thus have *always* been products of globalization and unequal power relations.

After about fifty years of rule in Ecuador, the Incas were thwarted by the arrival of the Spanish in 1526. The *conquistadores*' swift conquest was officially completed in 1534 (D'Altroy 2014:107). The Incas "never succeeded in imposing a uniform language, religion, or set of political institutions...to equate pre-Spanish Ecuador with 'the Inca,' then, is to misunderstand the diversity and history of the indigenous peoples in the region" (de la Torre and Striffler 2008: 9). However, as early as 1563, many indigenous groups began identifying themselves as descendants of the Incas. This "wholesale reorganization of collective memory" in the wake of the cultural annihilation of the Conquest continues to the present-day (Salomon 2008: 29).

Ecuador's borders began to emerge with a Spanish decree that established the *Audiencia*, or administrative unit, of Quito in 1563 (Lane 2002: 19). The Audiencia encompassed modern-day Ecuador as well as parts of Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. While the Audiencia of Quito was technically subordinate to the Viceroyalty of Peru, due to geographic distance it became somewhat autonomous. Throughout the period the region's borders fluctuated, and ultimately "it was imperial design, not effective possession or local ethnic division, that determined the cartographic shape of the colony" (Lane 2003: 77). To understand the internal divisions that continue to plague Ecuador, it is vital to recognize that colonial powers determined to further their own wealth tussled with each other to create the nation's borders. The colonial economy of Ecuador was built on the debt bondage and slave labor of indigenous peoples. By the close of the sixteenth century, about 70% of the indigenous population of Ecuador was dead from violence, disease, or the rigors of enslavement (Jokisch 2007).

To say that colonialism made a deep and lasting imprint on Ecuadorian culture, economy,

and psyche would be an understatement; although the nation has been independent for about 170 years, it was a colony for three centuries (Lane 2003: 75). One obvious legacy of Spanish rule is that 80% of the population identifies as Catholic (El Universo 2012), though syncretism with indigenous practices is common (Lane 2003: 94). Other Christian sects, such as Mormonism and Evangelicism are slowly gaining ground (Lane 2003: 95).

### Independence and the Early Republic

In 1822, Ecuadorian nationalists overthrew the Spanish royalists and joined Simón Bolívar's short-lived South American empire-republic, Gran Colombia. After eight years belonging to a republic characterized by weak central authority and regional divisions, Ecuador split from Gran Colombia to become an independent nation. However, the country itself was deeply divided, and for the next century and beyond, power struggles ensued between conservative, hacienda-owning elites tied to the capital of Quito, and wealthy merchants from the liberal port city of Guayaquil (Vélez 2014). This geographic and ideological split was exacerbated by the fact that travel, let alone trade, between the two cities was difficult due to the Andean peaks that isolated Quito and the surrounding highlands.

Though the country was now “free,” the hacienda system in the highlands continued to institutionalize the racial domination of indigenous populations, and literacy requirements excluded rural indigenous peoples from elections as recently as 1979 (de la Torre and Striffler 2008: 5). In fact, “for ordinary people, the highlands offered very little to recommend staying: low pay, an appallingly heavy tax burden, and all to frequent abuse at the hands of hacienda owners and public officials” (Pineo 2003: 139). Rural-urban migration from the highlands increased in the late nineteenth century, with Guayaquil rather than Quito as the primary destination (Pineo 2003: 139). Key exports included cacao and “Panama” hats, but these goods

were produced in the coastal regions and exported via Guayaquil. Furthermore, the prosperity of exports like cacao was concentrated among a very small oligarchy (Capello 2011: 15). Though connected with Guayaquil via telegraph in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and via rail in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Capello 2011: 15-17), Quito remained relatively isolated through the 1930s (FAO 1992).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the national government continued to flip between liberal and conservative leaders interspersed with periods of military rule. In 1942, Ecuador lost much of its Amazonian territory when Peruvian troops invaded and quickly overpowered Ecuadorian forces. Border disputes leading to minor armed conflicts with Peru continued through the 1990s. In the 1940s the banana industry began expanding, and since the 1960s Ecuador has been among the world's top banana producers (Pier 2002; see additional information in Chapter Two).

### Land Reform and Neoliberalism

In 1964, the “semi-feudal” hacienda system of the Ecuadorian highlands officially ended (Jokisch 1997: 63). Global revolutionary movements churned class and racial tensions in rural areas, leading to pressures for land reform, while the low-capital hacienda system was seen as inefficient within the dominant “Green Revolution” development paradigm (Weismantel 1988: 68). However, the redistribution of land was chaotic, and machines began replacing human wage labor on the large farming operations that remained (Colleredo-Mansfeld 2003: 280). In her ethnography of the rural parish of Zumbagua in the early 1980s, Weismantel notes that indigenous people welcomed the promise of greater political and social self-determination (1988: 69). At the same time, after land reform many rural smallholders faced unpredictable subsistence farming and insufficient opportunities for wage labor (Colleredo-Mansfeld 2003: 280).

The Amazonian oil drilling that began in Ecuador in the 1970s initially increased the

government's spending capacity. Cities ballooned in size, the middle-class expanded, and unionized workers achieved better pay (de la Torre and Striffler 2008: 191). At the same time, the rural poor were largely unaffected by these changes. Ecuador's increasingly heavy dependence on exports such as oil and bananas also left the small nation vulnerable to volatile international markets.

Ecuadorian national politics continued to be turbulent in the second half of the twentieth century. José María Velasco Ibarra was president five times between 1944 and 1972, but was only democratically elected once, and only served one complete four-year term without being ousted (Veléz 2014). In 1979 Ecuador initiated a revival of democracy in Latin America after an epoch of military rule throughout the region (Burbano de Lara 2003: 271). However, the 1980s and 1990s were politically unstable in addition to being economically disastrous by nearly all accounts (see Cameron and North 2003, Ungar 2007, Weismantel 2001, Whitten 2003). During this period, many Ecuadorian leaders and technocrats embraced a set of economic and political strategies now known as "neoliberalism."

"Neoliberalism" perhaps has been overused as a catchall to describe a complex array of phenomena and responses to globalization (Hoffman et al. 2006). However, I use the term to describe how beginning with the international debt crisis of the early 1980s, global economic bodies pushed indebted developing countries such as Ecuador to accept "structural adjustment" policies (Peck and Tickell 2002). That is, institutions such as the International Monetary Fund gave loans to Ecuador on the condition that Ecuador would open its markets to free trade, privatize and cut social services, and reduce food subsidies. However, Ecuador's adjustment to these new conditions was one of the least successful in Latin America. Between neoliberal economic policies and the collapse of oil prices, the Ecuadorian economy disintegrated

(Cameron and North 2003:6). In fact, between 1980 and 1992, monthly wages in constant *suces* declined by nearly 70% while violent crime increased by 192% (Colleredo-Mansfield 2003: 28). For small-scale farmers in the highlands, structural adjustment only compounded the negative effects of the previous decades' land-reform policies. Neoliberal agriculture policies supported the development of large-scale, export-based agriculture, while small producers increasingly struggled to access credit, land, and other resources (Swanson 2010: 13).

In the 1990s, the country continued to suffer from poor financial management combined with low oil prices and unstable export-agriculture (Jokisch 2014). The pinnacle of Ecuador's neoliberal period was in 2000, when the country switched its currency to the US dollar with the intent of stabilizing the economy after several currency crises (Matthews et al. 2006: 90). Neoliberal policies such as dollarization, coupled with earlier land reform, influenced three major societal shifts in Ecuador in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 2000s that are relevant to the Camal market: widespread migration from rural areas, an expanded urban informal economy, and increased international emigration.

### Internal and External Migration

Quito grew rapidly both in population and geographic area after the economic and political crises of the 1980s and 1990s. In response to land reform and the shift to intensive industrialized agriculture, many former rural highlanders have chosen to pursue opportunities in Quito (Swanson 2010: 13). During the 1990s the city's population experienced a 4.5% annual growth rate that was largely due to migration rather than high birth rates (Álvarez-Berrios et al. 2013). The current population of Quito metropolitan area is about two million, which is small compared to much larger cities such as Lima (eight million), but large considering that its population more than doubled between 1975 and 2000 (Carrion et al. 2003: 6). In terms of

geography, the urban area grew 70.9% between 1981 and 2001, and the extended urban area grew by 60.5 % during the same period (World Bank 2008).

Since 1980, between ten and fifteen percent of the Ecuadorian population has emigrated overseas, primarily to Spain and the United States (Jokisch 2014). There are currently 1.5 to 2 million Ecuadorians living abroad. While there has been a wave of returning immigrants since the mid-2000s, Ecuadorians also continue to leave the country for economic reasons or to join family members abroad (Jokisch 2014). In 2013 alone, Border Patrol apprehended 5,680 Ecuadorians attempting to enter the United States through Mexico (Jokisch 2014). Presumably, a much higher number of Ecuadorians successfully immigrated to the United States and elsewhere.

## Informal Urban Economy

Migrants tend to leave rural communities due to poverty and lack of opportunity, but formal employment in Ecuador's city can be difficult to find even for educated young people (Swanson 2010: 48). In light of this, many migrants to Quito have entered the informal economy. There is no agreed-upon definition of "informal economy," as the term refers to a field that is diverse and often small-scale rather than a specific occupation. In her landmark 1993 article "Rebuilding the Global City," sociologist Saskia Sassen writes that the informal economy "describes a process of income-generating activity characterized by the lack of regulation in a context where similar activities are regulated" (42). In Ecuador, as of 2010 about 53% percent of the working population is thought to be working in the informal economy, not including agriculture (Charmes 2012: 111). According to Swanson, "as a result of high levels of rural poverty, Ecuador's streets are overwhelmed by poor people trying to make a living by selling anything and everything, including umbrellas, newspapers, bootlegged CD, sunglasses, candies, and prepared foods" (2010: 13). Having too many sellers and not enough buyers can lead to financial instability, but dense low-income populations who buy small quantities of goods on a daily basis create a high demand for informal vendors (Teltscher 1994: 6). In cities like Quito informal vendors definitely form a large and vibrant sector of the economy, though ultimately it is difficult to distinguish who precisely is "formal" and who is "informal" (Middleton 2003: 73). Camal's vendors, for example do not fit neatly into either category: they work at their own very small businesses (informal), in a municipal market (formal), selling untaxed goods (informal).

City planning policies have attempted to remove informal vendors from Quito's streets for almost two centuries, justified by a logic of racial hygiene that I cover in the next chapter (Bromley 1998: 1327; Middleton 2003: 77). However, efforts to remove vendors were mostly



futile in light of the demographic pressures that continued to pull more rural migrants into the urban informal economy (Middleton 2003: 78). Since the 1990s the municipal government has implemented an urban renewal campaign that has, finally, successfully removed nearly 7000 vendors from Quito's colonial center (Swanson 2007: 713). As I explore more fully in the next chapter, this campaign relocated many vendors from the city center to more peripheral municipal markets, including Camal (Middleton 2003: 78).

### Ecuadorian Politics Today

When Rafael Correa was elected president of Ecuador in 2006, “he promised to put an end to the ‘long and sad night of neoliberalism’” (Conaghan 2008: 46). Correa’s election, together with the elections of his allies Evo Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, was dubbed “the new Left Turn” in Latin America (Murat 2012). These regimes have all attempted to redirect income generated from oil drilling and other extractive industries to “poor majorities” (Robinson 2012). Unlike the more explicitly Marxist frameworks adopted elsewhere, Correa’s brand of “‘twenty-first-century socialism’ does not completely reject capitalism. Instead, this new model rejects market policies imposed by any foreign source, seeking instead to incorporate capitalism within a humanitarian rubric” (Kennemore and Weeks 2011: 2). Early in his presidency, Correa doubled poverty assistance payments (*el bono*), increased taxes on foreign oil companies, and funneled millions of dollars into social programs (Conaghan 2008: 208-209). Many accounts concur that during Correa’s time in office, poverty has decreased in Ecuador and the middle-class has expanded (Ferreira et al. 2013: 118; World Bank 2015). The Gini coefficient points to increasing income equality in Ecuador beginning in 2003 (three years before Correa was elected) and continuing through the present (de la Torre 2014: 459). The vast majority of Camal’s vendors I interviewed expressed strong support for their president, whom

they believed differed from the corrupt, elitist leaders of the past. There was a sense that Correa had created hope for the working-class families of Camal, if not for the vendors themselves, then for their children.

At the same time, many scholars and global watchdog groups have criticized Correa's squashing of social movements (Becker 2013) and questioned the effectiveness and sustainability of his social programs (de la Torre 2014). Many indigenous groups who once supported the president now consider him an enemy because of how he has undermined their autonomy and increased oil extraction (Kennemore and Weeks 2011: 10). Correa has censored the press on many occasions (de la Torre 2014), and recently created a program to investigate and expose those who anonymously criticize his government on social media (Morla 2015). In 2014 Correa proposed changing the constitution so he can be reelected indefinitely; it is expected that this amendment will be approved (Alvaro 2014) His government continues to consolidate power in the executive branch and has created an electoral process that favors incumbents (de la Torre 2014: 457). Through his "permanent campaign," Correa has created a media smokescreen that makes it difficult to distinguish between substantive change and misleading populist propaganda (Conaghan and de la Torre: 2008). As Correa purportedly looks towards a fourth term in 2017, it is up for debate whether he is creating a socialist democracy or embodying "the latest and most fashionable incarnation of dictatorship" (Colburn and Trejos 2010, quoted in Murat 2012: 151). The same problem has plagued presumably populist governments in Venezuela and elsewhere.

One of the hallmarks of President Correa's presidency thus far has been the new constitution of 2008. According to this document, Ecuador had a "plurinational, pluricultural, and multiethnic identity" (Political Database of the Americas). Though much of the 2008

constitution has not been enforced (Kennemore and Weeks 2011: 10), government recognition of the diversity of the Ecuadorian people was a breakthrough. Previously the official discourse on race was based on *mestizaje*, or the assumption that the gradual blending of indigenous and European races had formed a uniquely Latin American race (de la Torre 1999: 93). However, *mestizaje* is often based on deep-seated belief in *blanqueamiento*, or whitening, of the population as a national project, which presumes that indigenous peoples are inferior and need to be racially elevated by procreating with whites (Rahier 2013: 2). In fact, “the process of *mestizaje* is not so much about mixing as it is about a progressive whitening of the population” (Swanson 2010: 15). Though blatant racism is an everyday occurrence throughout Ecuador (Weismantel 2001), the mantra of “we are all *mestizos*” has often been used as justification for ignoring racial inequalities (Guss 2000: 60). Afro-Ecuadorians, who constitute about ten percent of the population, typically have not been included in popular understandings of *mestizaje* and are demonized as outsiders (Rahier 2013: 24). When it comes to understanding race relations in Ecuador, “diverse” should not be conflated with “harmonious.”

## Conclusion

As this overview has demonstrated, globalization and capitalism are not new phenomena for the Ecuadorian people. Since the Conquest, their country has been tied up in unequal political and economic relationships that have spanned the globe. From gold to Panama hats and bananas, Ecuador has been interconnected with distant markets and circulating commodities for centuries. The key difference that is relevant for Camal today is that because of immigration and the mass media, Ecuadorians of all social classes are now very aware of the global middle-class lifestyle. They themselves, or their friends and family members, have emigrated and seen the material wealth of the United States or Europe. *Telenovelas* and commercials normalize and glamorize consumerism (Swanson 2010: 47). As Swanson notes in reference to the inhabitants of Calhuasi, a rural highland community: “in recent years they have not become poorer; rather, they have become more acutely aware of their poverty” (2010: 2). Grocery stores, not markets like Camal, are often perceived as the sophisticated and modern way to consume. That perception partially explains why transnational supermarkets and retail outlets have boomed in Latin America in recent decades: in the 1990s alone, their market share grew from 10% to 60% (Robinson 2012). I explore this shift towards supermarkets in Chapter Three.

The final key take-away from this chapter is that since independence almost two centuries ago, the Ecuadorian political system has been largely unstable and the government has often failed to serve the interests of most of the population. At the same time, “whatever else can be said about these conflicts--and at times they have been quite brutal--they have not resulted in the genocides, mass disappearances, and ‘Dirty Wars’ that have characterized much of Latin America” (de la Torre and Stiffler 2008: 6). Violent government-based repression in Ecuador has remained relatively scarce. The lack of widespread militarized conflict even during periods of

economic and political strife perhaps speaks to an underlying sense of solidarity (de la Torre and Striffler 2008: 6). Today, however, crime and random violence are on the rise, and this shift has been profoundly disruptive to the national psyche.

## Chapter Two

### Modernity and Quito's Markets: Spatializing *Buen Vivir*

In this chapter, I trace how the physical geography of Quito—particularly its food markets—came to be permeated with notions of racial difference. I begin with Quito's North-South division, because understanding that divide is pivotal for contextualizing Camal's reputation today. Next, I explore how the proliferation of new retail forms since the 1960s and the emergence of a "global consumer class" have played out in Quito. Finally, I look at the specific histories and present dynamics of consumption in both Old Town and the Recreo mall located in South Quito across the street from Camal. A common thread running through this chapter is that for centuries, Quiteños have been grappling with the concept of modernity. As anthropologist Lisa Rofel notes in her book *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism*:

To understand the passion with which modernity is pursued by people who have been made to live in a decentered relationship to Europe and the United States...we must recognize specific histories of colonialism and socialism, as well as the contours of late-twentieth century global political and cultural economies. (1999: 3)

This chapter is dedicated to understanding the "specific histories" of marketing in Quito, and how they have worked to create the deep stigma that currently surrounds Camal.

#### Understanding North and South in Quito

From the colonial era to the present, layers of racial and class-based divisions have been embedded in Quito's particular topography. Quito is nestled in a narrow valley between Andean peaks, resulting in a dramatic North-South axis that has become more pronounced as the city has grown. One of the few feature-length contemporary Ecuadorian films, *A tus espaldas*, or "Behind You," traces the meaning of Quito's North-South division in the contemporary popular imagination. The title refers to the *panecillo*, a large statue of a winged Virgin Mary that is

perched on a hill overlooking Quito. The Virgin is located just behind the Old Town and faces North, seemingly blessing most of the city, while the South languishes at her back. Director Tito Jara, himself a Quiteño, notes that the aluminum angel's gaze "reflects the power structures and social separation of the city. The Virgin had to face churches, the government, while at her back have always been the workers" (Ecuador Times MS 2011). Of course, this binary logic oversimplifies a complex city. For example, Colombian refugees, one of Quito's most marginalized and impoverished populations (Leutert 2012), predominantly live in peripheral *barrios populares* in North Quito (Feinstein International Center 2012: 16).

Erik Harms, who studies urban edge-dwellers in Vietnam, notes that "although ideal categories suffer descriptive deficiencies when faced with the elements of actual social life, they have tremendous staying power" (2010: 25). Rather than debunking Quito's mythical North-South divide, in this chapter I consider how these ideal categories have historically shaped and continue to shape the city that surrounds Camal today. In other words, I try to understand the hold these categories have (Harms 2010: 5).

### The Roots of Exclusion in Quito's Market Spaces

As stated in the previous chapter, pre-Colombian Ecuador had complex networks of trade, tribute, and reciprocity, but no markets or merchants as they are understood in contemporary and capitalist contexts. However, after the Conquest the Spaniards quickly began coercing indigenous peoples to "sell" the items that the *conquistadores* wanted for themselves (Ramírez 1995: 146). Additionally, from the earliest days of colonization the Audiencia of Quito imposed onto the indigenous population one of the highest tribute burdens in Spanish empire (Newson 1995: 179). To avoid crippling tribute requirements many indigenous families from the surrounding highlands abandoned their land to become urban artisans or vendors, or they sought

wage labor in construction, agriculture, or textiles (Newson 1995: 180). An economy centered on small enterprises, wage labor, and commercial markets thus emerged very early in colonial Quito.

Native populations assertively shaped burgeoning commodity markets in colonial Ecuador without fully assimilating into the Spanish economy (Larson 1995: 18). In fact, indigenous peoples “frequently *initiated* marketplace participation in order to resist marketplace participation under less favorable circumstances” (Stern 1995: 77, emphasis added). For example, many communities repurposed existing communal institutions such as *ayllus* (a form of kinship-based local governance) to engage in a mercantile economy. While colonial records suggest that Indians sold goods as individuals, these records mask how local chiefs often mobilized *ayllus* to create a surplus that could then be sold for the benefit of the entire community (Stern 1995: 77).

From the beginning colonial Quito was a “hybrid space” where indigenous and European forms layered to create a rich landscape, albeit one permeated with unequal power relations (Capello 2011: 7). Atahualpa’s general Rumiñahui burned down the Incan city of Quito before Belalcázar arrived to conquer it in 1534 (Newson 1995: 173). However, the city was rebuilt from the salvageable ruins by forced indigenous labor. An enormous Franciscan monastery was constructed from the remains of the grand Incan Temple of the Sun, and Quito’s first market was founded in 1535 in the adjacent *plaza de San Francisco* (Ramirez 1995: 143). From the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century through the 17<sup>th</sup> century expanding textile industry prompted rural-urban migration to Quito, and more wage-laborers in the city created a higher demand for market goods.

Perceptions of race played a pivotal role in the earliest markets, and by the dawn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there was an “ever more diverse mix of captives and castaways crowding Quito’s



bustling market squares” (Lane 2002: 87). The racial hierarchy dictated that in the early markets, indigenous people primarily sold produce while Spaniards raised and sold livestock (Newson 1995: 180). However, because indigenous people were exempt from the *alcabala*, or sales tax, Spaniards and *mestizos* often conscripted indigenous them to sell their goods or even masqueraded as Indians themselves (Newson 1995: 181). Hundreds of year later, market vendors still mobilize strategic assertions of racial identity to create economic footholds for themselves (Tsing 2009).

In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, Quito entered a long period of economic stagnation. The decline of the Potosi mine depleted Spanish coffers, and the Crown’s new anti-protectionist economic policies prompted an influx of cheap French cloth into the Spanish Empire, thus challenging Quito’s textile industry. Economic crisis and the ensuing out-migration “virtually froze the city in time as new construction stagnated over the next century” (Capello 2011: 9). Meanwhile, trade deregulation allowed Guayaquil to grow as a port city and the smaller city of Cuenca to boom as an exporter for quinine, a tree bark used to treat malaria and other diseases spread by globalization (Capello 2011: 9). In 1830, when Quito’s first municipal council was established, “it was a city cut off from the world, strongly influenced by the church... in which the upper classes and the indigenous population were in permanent hierarchical contact” (Middleton 2003: 76). In this era the capital lost its economic prominence, which it has never fully regained.

In 1861, *caudillo* Gabriel Garcia Moreno began a fourteen-year regime as president that was characterized by both an intensification of historical racial subjugation and a fierce drive to modernize the country (Henderson 2008). Moreno revived debt peonage through the new institution of *concertaje*, which conscripted indigenous labor for haciendas and to build national infrastructure, in particular roads connecting the Andean and coastal regions (Capello 2011: 12).

*Concertaje* thus both disempowered the rural poor and created the infrastructure that would eventually enable to Quito's integration into national and global markets. While Moreno envisioned Guayaquil as the country's economic powerhouse, Quito was his "site for symbolic construction" (Capello 2011: 13) That is, he wanted to restore and create beautiful spaces that would revive the struggling capital as a modern Catholic village of art, science, and religious devotion. To that end Moreno brought in a European architect to redesign the Alameda, a park just North of the colonial center, with the first astronomical observatory in South America as its centerpiece (Capello 2011: 13).

Moreno renovated the *Plaza de la Independencia* in the colonial city center, which had formerly been a pasture used for a market and "impromptu bullfights" (Henderson 2008: 205). Moreno replaced the open space with a French-inspired garden, though he had to install troops to prevent Quiteños from chopping down the trees or stepping on the flowers (Henderson 2008: 205; Bromley 1998: 1327). Even at this early date the Old Town was officially designated as an ornamental place, where aesthetic and economic value springs from the plaza's potential to be admired rather than used (Bourdieu 1984). However, despite various efforts to remove vendors to create a space of high culture, the market in the *Plaza de Independencia* continued through the 1970s on the paved areas between the flowerbeds (Bromley 1998: 1327; Middleton 2003: 77).

In the Old Town, Moreno also initiated the construction of a massive Neo-Gothic cathedral that reflects nostalgia for medieval Europe's conservative religiosity (Capello 2011: 12). Though the cathedral took over a century to build and did not open until the 1980s, it reinvents the Old Town as a historic, traditional and therefore legitimate space (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1984). Meanwhile, in South Quito García Moreno ordered the construction of a panopticon prison with black interior walls (Capello 2011: 13), where inmates performed

repetitive, useless tasks (Salvatore and Aguirre 1996: 11). Through his construction projects, Moreno reified a particular spatial narrative about Quito. The North is a frontier of modernity, where one can stroll in a cosmopolitan park or stargaze in an observatory. The Center is the lush centerpiece and a breathtaking architectural performance of devotion to God. The South, meanwhile, is where *work* happens: the work of manufacturing textiles, or the work of transforming delinquents into governable subjects. South Quito is an integral part of the city, but it is a “backstage” area not meant for outsiders.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, scientific racism and positivist notions of progress provided new justification for elite intolerance of indigenous and working-class people in public space in Quito (Middleton 2003: 78). Middleton notes that

while there were genuine scientific concerns about the health implications of the sale of food on the streets, the hygienist ideology nevertheless supported an anti-indigenous prejudice on the part of the upper classes and the emerging middle classes of Quito (2003: 79)

The municipality attempted to force street and market vendors in the Old Town to rent shops and thus enter the “formal” sector, as this would presumably be a step towards cultural and economic modernity (Middleton 2003: 78). Additionally, vendors attached to specific storefronts would be immobilized, and thus would become more “legible” to officials and thus easier to control (Scott 1998: 18).

However, the municipal council’s efforts to remove and relocate vendors were hampered by “a deeply embedded culture of passive and active resistance” (Middleton 2003: 78).

Additionally, rural economic and racial oppression continued to drive more migrants to Quito. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Quito’s industrial sector expanded, especially after the city was connected to the national rail line 1908 (Capello 2011: 20). In 1919 the abolition of *concertaje* sparked another wave of migration of rural workers to South Quito (Capello 2011:

20). When faced with the lack of other opportunities in the city, many migrants became independent vendors or started informal enterprises. Meanwhile the upper classes began migrating out of the colonial center to new and modern residential districts in the North, thus deepening the city's stratified spatial structure (Middleton 2003: 78).

At this point, Quito's predominantly female vendors were already stigmatized as threatening women who traversed binaries such as *mestizo*-indigenous, urban-rural, and public-private (Swanson 2007: 716). The first municipal market building, *Mercado de San Francisco*, was opened in 1918 in an effort to create a more civilized, less congested downtown (Bromley 1993: 1317). However, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the municipality engaged in what amounted to a high-stakes game of whack-a-mole with vendors in the Old Town. The municipal council would mandate the removal of vendors from a particular area, but vendors would quickly reappear in greater numbers than before, either in the same location or nearby (Middleton 2003). Through the 1990s, official efforts to remove vendors in the Old Town largely failed.

#### Old Town: Revitalization through Today

In the mid-1990s, the Old Town was subjected to a "revitalization campaign" (Dowl 2008) led by Ecuadorian business leaders, foreign development organizations, and the municipal government. This effort has funneled public and private investments worth hundreds of millions of dollars into the area now dubbed the *Centro Historico* (Dowl 2008). What were the goals of the campaign? That depends on whom you ask, and when, but they have included: improving the livelihoods of local residents (Middleton 2003: 81), creating a secure environment for foreign investment (Middleton 2003: 83), restoring cultural patrimony, and attracting the "global tourist class" (Swanson 2007: 714). Cities around the world have pursued similar strategies in order to "rebrand" and reinvent themselves within competitive global markets (Zukin 2010). In the next

chapter, I explore how the revitalization effort has affected the infrastructure in Old Town. But for this section, the most relevant aspect of the campaign is the successful removal of markets and informal vendors from the colonial streets and plazas.

Since the 1990s, city councils across the world have undertaken efforts to remove informal vendors from their historic city centers (Bromley 1998: 246; Bromley and Mackie 2009: 1485, Mackie et al 2014: 1886). A 1998 city plan for Quito's Old Town published blamed most of the problems identified, from dilapidated buildings to environmental contamination, on street vendors (Middleton 2003: 108). In 1995 the municipality closed Quito's oldest market, the bustling *Mercado de San Francisco* in the Old Town (Bromley 1998: 1327). The market was originally slated to become a parking garage, but in January 2015 was reopened as a tourist market after an intensive renovation (Guerrero 2015). The official narrative behind the vendor removal and initial market closure was that informal commerce was holding back the Old Town from becoming a fully modern historical landmark. However, that represents just one of many potential readings. Another reading says that the informal vendors--who often do not consider themselves indigenous but whose vocation is deeply associated with indigeneity-- were removed because threatened the reinvention of the Old Town as a whiter, more affluent, and modern space.

Informal vendors do have some leverage. Vendors and markets are removed to encourage tourism, and yet displaced, angry vendors may return to create problematic public disruptions in historic areas. City councils may be wary of using violent means to remove vendors from "landmark" areas, because doing so could create a perception of instability that drives away tourists (Middleton 2003: 74). While the municipality of Quito has enforced market closures and the removal of street vendors, on many occasions vendors have successfully instigated the

relocation process (Bromley 1998: 1326). In 1997 vendors occupied the City Council's offices in Old Town until the Mayor addressed their grievances (Middleton 2003: 74). In 2003, a decade of wrangling between vendors and municipal authorities culminated when the municipality successfully removed almost 7000 informal workers from the *Centro Historico* (Swanson 2007: 713). Most of the Old Town vendors were relocated to ten municipal markets beyond the purview of tourists, one which was Camal (Middleton 2003: 78; Swanson 2007: 713).

Cultural tourism brings foreigners to Quito, and for many tourists, “authenticity is the gauge with which we measure the success of a memorable holiday” (Presser 2014). Bodies of indigenous women are often presented as the pinnacle of “authentic” culture (Zavala 2010). Souvenirs in Quito often include representations of indigenous women, and in some upscale hotels in Old Town—like the one my parents stayed in when they visited me in Quito—the female staff dress wear colonial costumes. And yet women market vendors in Quito, who are often perceived as indigenous, have been systematically removed from public space in Quito's Old Town and are hidden from tourists in less-visited areas of the city. More controllable representations of indigeneity are seen as preferable to autonomous, mobile women who sell on their own terms.

In terms of making the Old Town a tourist destination, the revitalization campaign has been an enormous success. Tourism to Quito has grown consistently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the municipality's goal is to have one million annual visitors by 2018 (Quito Turismo 2015). In 2013 alone, international tourism to Quito increased by 18% (Quito Turismo 2015). One guidebook author recalls that Old Town used to be “horribly seedy” and “street peddlers had taken over the plaza [de San Francisco]” (Jones 2012), though in fact vendors had worked in the colonial plazas for centuries (Middleton 2003:76). Another writer notes that since the revitalization, Quito is

perfect for marveling at “luscious *conquistador* architecture” (Presser 2014). According to this reading, the romantic legacy of the Conquest had been reclaimed from unsightly vendors.

Ecuadorian anthropologists Ana Maria Goetschel and Eduardo Kingman have a different interpretation. They argue that Old Town today “is conceived as a historical space but at the same time dehistoricized. It is a controlled, orderly and clean space, which turns its back on history and the city itself. The renovation of the historic downtown was modeled on shopping mall aesthetics” (2005: quoted in Carrión and Nuñez Vega 2003: 3, translation by the author). Quito’s Old Town has not quite achieved the Disneyland ambiance of Cusco, where informal vendors were violently removed from the historic plazas in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Bromley and Mackie 2009: 1489). Today, a McDonalds and a Starbucks are wedged into Cusco’s tourist-clogged central plaza. Peruvian children wearing indigenous costumes and holding baby animals approach tourists, offering to be photographed for a small fee. Goetschel and Kingman would likely bemoan how in Cusco’s tourist section, cultural difference has become a performative, freely traded commodity in a highly disciplined space.

Old Town Quito may be heading in the similar direction as Cusco. However I differ from anthropologists like Goetschel and Kingman who see the changing landscape of Quito’s colonial core as unequivocally “bad.” I believe that tourism to Quito reflects neocolonial nostalgia *to an extent* (Chambers and Buzinde 2015). The municipality relocated many of Old Town’s vendors *in part* to profit from that nostalgia and as part of an ongoing racial-hygienist planning regime. But their logic was not so straightforwardly depraved; what if there really were too many vendors in a relatively small space, and they were blocking public access to historical sites? Furthermore, most of the refurbished landmarks in the Old Town are free and today are enjoyed by at least as many Ecuadorians (seemingly of diverse social classes) as international tourists. In

several of the plazas, street theater troupes perform political and social commentary. In these performances, the webs of cultural referents were spun so tightly that I could never follow the plot. Vendors still sell inexpensive ice cream and other snacks throughout Old Town, and on warm days families walk the streets, licking cones and enjoying their cultural patrimony. Yes, their enslaved ancestors perhaps built the churches and plazas. History is brutal. I can critique endlessly. But Quito's Old Town is not quite a "shopping mall."

### Provisioning the Modern City

Over the past hundred and fifty years as Quito's colonial center has gradually become a historical showplace, the question has arisen about where to relocate the less-monumental places that provision food for the city. Camal is particularly tied up in the history of Quito's slaughterhouses, because as mentioned in the introduction, the market is located on the site that housed the municipal-run slaughterhouse from the 1940s until the mid-1990s. The slaughterhouse was not always located where the Camal market now sits. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the slaughterhouse was on a plaza in the city center known as the *Plaza de los Carniceros*, or the "Butchers' Plaza" (Capello 2011: 120). This plaza purportedly created "a fetid atmosphere, saturated with foul odors that affected citizens' day-to-day lives" (Pozo 2001: 15, translation by the author). During President Garcia Moreno's era of "modernization," Quito's elites<sup>1</sup> petitioned to have the slaughterhouse relocated, and in 1865 the municipal council decreed that the Butchers' Plaza would close (Pozo 2001: 15). From what I can gather, the city's primary slaughterhouse was relocated within the city center several times in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Pozo 2001: 19-20). Meanwhile, in 1879 another wave of "modernization" projects swept through Quito and the original slaughterhouse in the Butchers' plaza was partially

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<sup>1</sup> Known as the *vecinos* or "neighbors" but perhaps more accurately described as whites. See Weismantel 2001: xxxi.



razed to make room for a National Theatre. The theater, which is still in use, retained the original arches from slaughterhouse to create a “neoclassical ethos” (Capello 2011: 120). The *Plaza de los Carniceros* was thus transformed into cultural patrimony and is today known as the *Plaza del Teatro*.

In response to ongoing concerns about hygiene and odors surrounding the more central slaughterhouses, in 1949 Quito’s municipal slaughterhouse (or the *camal* in Spanish) was relocated on the site that today houses the Camal market (Pozo 2001: 20). The Southern neighborhood of Chiriyacu was selected because it was on the periphery but also close to the railroad (Pozo 2001: 20). Though the municipality attempted to regulate the slaughterhouse, Camal was infamous for its lack of hygiene, poor equipment, and the stench of blood (Pozo 2001: 23; “El Antiguo Camal” 2014). Furthermore, the site was purportedly an unruly borderland between the city and the surrounding rural highlands. In a newspaper article about the neighborhood’s history, a local taxi driver recalled how the stockbreeders would sell their cattle at Camal and then counted their “bundles” of new cash at the local bars (“El Antiguo Camal” 2014). In 1991 one of Ecuador’s preeminent multi-media artists, Miguel Alvear, created a short film of the butchering at Camal. Through his “sensitive gaze” Alvear subverted “the tacit abjection of the space...all possible sensation of repulsion disappears and draws [it] us into a contemplative state” (Moncayo 2006). Alvear demonstrates that while the blood splatters and mangled carcasses were undoubtedly “real,” interpretation is always an open question.

In the 1960s, about two decades after the establishment of the Camal slaughterhouse in South Quito, the city’s first supermarket opened its doors on the opposite side of town. An Irish-Ecuadorian entrepreneur founded the original *Favorita* grocery store in an upscale development in North Quito (Bromley 1998: 1315; Verdezoto 2007: 63). During the subsequent oil boom

private-sector developers built more high-rises and shopping centers, and by the mid-1970s, there were three major grocery stores in North Quito (Bromley 1998: 1315).

As private investment built up North Quito, the colonial center “developed inner-city characteristics” and continued to be filled with street vendors, markets and small shops (Bromley 1998: 1315). At the same time, revenues from oil extraction in the 1970s enabled the municipality to improve local infrastructure, and spurred the construction of more market buildings outside the city center (Bromley 1998: 1317). During this period the city government constructed a market building adjacent to the municipal slaughterhouse at Camal in an effort to ease congestion in the Old Town (Bromley 1974: 62). The market was initially intended to be a twice-a-week *feria* or “market fair.” Due to the population boom in South Quito Camal soon became a large daily market (Bromley 1998: 256), though today extra vendors and customers come to the *feria* days on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

At least until the mid-2000s, the growth of grocery stores and malls in Quito seemingly did not have a strong negative impact on the street and market vendors who worked outside of the *Centro Historico* in markets like Camal (Bromley 1998: 1325). In fact, street and market vending greatly increased through the 1980s and 1990s due to deteriorating economic conditions that spurred rural-urban migration while preventing most of Quito’s growing population from joining the “modern” global consumer class (Bromley 1998: 1314). Since at the time most Quiteños did not have cars and public transit was relatively inefficient, lack of mobility further limited access to the few supermarkets and malls concentrated in North Quito. To accommodate growing demand, between 1972 and 1995 the number of municipal market buildings in South Quito doubled from five to ten (Bromley 1998: 1318).

By the late twentieth century, South Quito had expanded dramatically and Camal was in a dense neighborhood rather than on the rural-urban edge. In 1994 the municipal slaughterhouse was once again pushed further out of the city, as a large new facility with more modern equipment was opened in the rural district of Guamani (“El Camal Metropolitano” 2014). However, the market that for decades had existed alongside the slaughterhouse remained retained the name “Camal.” The abject historical connotations of that name linger, and likely shape the market’s reputation. The old slaughterhouse building was completely transformed into one of Quito’s thirty government-funded “Thrifty Shopping Centers.” Known as the Chiriyacu market, today the Thrifty Shopping Center sits adjacent to Camal and houses vendors who mostly sell pirated DVDS and off-label clothing. Chiriyacu would be an interesting site for an ethnography of globalization, based on this brief analysis by Ecuadorian art critic María Belén Moncayo:

The Ch.C.C. [*Chiriyacu Centro Comercial*] is merely a municipally funded link in the chain of Thrifty Commercial Centers, which — within the dynamics of "urban regeneration" — aim to displace the informal street trade from the Historic Colonial Center... we today find merchandise originating from the Chinese black market — exhibited on Caucasian-looking mannequins, manufactured in Ecuador — sold by indigenous people and migrants from the provinces.

Chiriyacu is an indoor market that more closely resembles a mall compared to Camal, and according to staff at the local non-profit CENIT, the vendors are typically of higher socio-economic status than Camal’s vendors. My fieldwork and interviews were focused almost entirely on Camal, primarily because the prospect of including yet another market in my study was overwhelming, though I occasionally wandered in Chiriyacu or ran errands there with vendors from Camal.

*Buen Vivir in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century malls and supermarkets have expanded into South Quito, and they have begun creating direct competition for vendors at Camal and other markets. The largest grocery store chain, Favorita, opened several extra-large “hypermarkets” called *Megamaxis* throughout Quito in the early 2000s. Between 2001 and 2006, the company’s capitalization skyrocketed from US \$224 million to \$1.33 billion (Verdezoto 2007: 63).

The explanation behind the partial shift towards grocery stores in South Quito is complex. First, as described in the previous chapter, in 2001 Ecuador replaced its national currency with the U.S. dollar. Though dollarization initially sparked an economic crisis, over time the stable currency has enabled the growing Ecuadorian working and middle-classes to participate in global consumer culture and save for expensive, imported items like cars (UN Millennium Development Goals Database 2012; Keeley and Kess 2013b: 23). The upper-class adult son of my landlord in Quito summarized how dollarization and the subsequent economic growth has changed his city:

Before we had *sucres*...It was very expensive to have a car because the *sucres* were never worth enough. So we had a lot of very old cars and we used public transit, which was never very good, but it was what we had. There were very few malls. In general, the city was relatively small, there were not many buildings... The process of adapting to the dollar was complex. It took time. There was instability and a lot of immigration out of the country...And then, slowly, things got better.

In the province of Pinchincha, where Quito is located, the number of registered vehicles almost doubled between 2008 and 2013 (Camacho et al. 2013). More people have cars and can drive to big shopping centers, rather than walking to the nearest market or hub of street vendors.

However, Quiteños’ growing capacity to drive to the grocery store and perhaps afford the higher prices is not enough to explain why these stores have grown more popular; an ideological shift that prompts shoppers to change their habits must also occur. As Sassen noted of shifting retail forms in London, Tokoyo, and New York in the 1980s:

High income of the new workers was not sufficient to explain the transformation. Less tangible factors also matter. An examination of this transformation reveals a dynamic whereby an economic potential--the consumption capacity represented by high disposable income--is realized through the emergence of a *new vision of the good life*. (1993: 36, emphasis added).

This quote is particularly relevant considering that since his election in 2006, President Rafael Correa's stated mission has been to bring *buen vivir* or "the good life" to more Ecuadorians (de la Torre 2014: 460).

Correa's interpretation of *buen vivir* is, according to him, inspired by the Kichwa expression *sumak kawsay*, which means to live "in harmony with our communities, ourselves, and most importantly, with our living, breathing environment" (Torres-Tovar and De Vos 2013). Referring to a Kichwa concept lends moral authenticity to Correa's policies of *buen vivir*, but on the ground, increasing "harmony" has often looked more like increasing consumerism. As a municipal employee and community organizer in South Quito explained:

People see [shopping at malls] on the television, and they think, I want to be like that. It's about what your neighbors, your friends would say. If you say, 'oh, I just got back from the market,' people will be like, 'ew!' [He makes a face and laughs.] No one wants to say that. (Interview July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013).

Quiteños often idealize cities like Miami and New York precisely because they are imagined as lacking an informal sector (Swanson 2007: 712). Grocery stores and shopping malls have a glamorous pull in an epoch when many Quiteños are once again working to place their city within modernity. According to this narrative, the Old Town's magnificent churches and plazas are beautiful relics of a colonization that ended long ago. Ecuador is thus an independent, multi-cultural, modern nation where everyone gets a shot at "the good life."

The Recreo is a large mall that today sits a half block away and across a busy street from Camal. In Spanish *recreo* means "playground" or "recess," which is a fitting name considering that in cities across the world, entering a shopping mall can feel like a vacation from the gritty

urban landscape. The Recreo mall's website even includes a lofty vision statement, which is to "always create new dreams. To be a business that dreams, that believes in and realizes the dreams of its clients, members, and collaborators." At the same time, the mall's name comes from the hacienda Recreo that historically occupied the same ground ("El Recreo: Quiénes Somos" 2015). The name's reference to a hacienda is a reminder not to float away from the material history of inequality and oppression that shapes even the most "post-modern" spaces.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Recreo hacienda was replaced with the *Internacional* textile factory, which operated there until 1991 (Peralta and Moya 2003: 137). In fact, the various *Internacional* factories in South Quito were a major driver of rural-urban migration (Capello 2011: 20). The first section of the Recreo mall opened in 1995, with several subsequent expansions and a final wing slated to open in 2015 ("El Recreo: Quiénes Somos" 2015). Today Recreo contains a Megamaxi, one of the La Favorita corporations' new extra-large "hypermarkets," and the movie theater has ten screens and over two thousand seats. The complex also includes MediRecreo, which according to the mall's website is the first-ever medical center in an Ecuadorian mall.

### Conclusion

The broad cycles of industrialization, modernization and globalization I have outlined in this chapter created the Camal market, and they continue to shape the market today. The apples at Camal come from California and Chile, the toys are made in China, and vendors' sons send remittances from New York. The market is deeply embedded in global flows of labor and commodities. And yet Camal is also on the edge of those processes: the cell phones for sale were probably stolen, the clothes are not name brand, that son in New York lives as "illegal alien" in his new country. Camal is a counterargument to the dream of a global middle class.

Meanwhile, the Recreo mall across the street looks uncannily similar to the suburban U.S. American malls and superstores that my middle-class family and I have always avoided. We live in the dead center of modernity's dream, but now as "good liberals" we crave something more "real," even if that just means the unfinished floors and singular flavors of Trader Joes'. I was originally drawn to Camal because to me the place looked like the world's biggest farmers' market on steroids. Camal seemed like it could be an "authentic" community place, whereas even our farmers' market at home was born out of a reaction against the "bowling alone" culture of American suburbs (Putnam 2000).

But sometimes too much "authenticity," even if it was an illusion, was exhausting. At Camal I interacted with impoverished small children, who often wore stained clothes and spent their days helping their mothers prepare produce to sell. Besides working children, the market was filled with loud noises, the occasional sex worker sniffing glue, and puddles of animal blood. I was unaccustomed to the clamorous environment, and during fieldwork I often retreated to catch up on notes at the relatively serene Recreo.

My favorite place was a Starbucks lookalike that sold "filtered American coffee" for the outrageous (by Quito standards) price of one dollar. There were dark wood tables in a clean, roped-off area, and on each table an embedded tile read, "only for customers." One afternoon the cashier mechanically called out my receipt number, though I was the only customer and the lone coffee on the counter was clearly mine. As I ventured to pick up my drink, I left my bag on my table.

I had almost finished my wonderful cup of not-Nescafe when a boy, maybe nine years old, appeared at my table. He was unsmiling in a stained orange fleece and held out both his hands. "Please," he said, and something else I could not decipher. Startled, I shook my head and

he disappeared before the cashier noticed him. This fake-Starbucks looked like a safe zone of middle-class consumerism within the biting neoliberal economy, but the edge was more porous than I had imagined. It was suddenly obvious that even at my private table, I was not safe from the city's crowdedness, its neediness, its hands outstretched. Even here I had to look in the eye, albeit briefly, one of the many faces of poverty and inequality in Quito. I had to recognize both my own and this boy's relative positions within all of the big, complicated processes that brought us each to this moment. I sat with my empty Styrofoam cup for a few moments, then wrapped my bag tightly around my arm and headed back out to the market.



## Chapter Three

### Unpacking "Danger" at the Camal Market

The easy part about doing an ethnography of Quito's Camal market was that nearly everyone I encountered in the city had an adamant opinion about the place. The hard part was that their opinion was usually that I should not go to Camal. Taxi drivers raised their eyebrows in the rearview mirror. My landlord was aghast, and her son found my research amusing. "Camal is--" he paused and smiles at me in the way you smile at *gringas* you presume to be confused, "—a very *complicated* place. A dangerous place." These conversations made me feel like the doomed sidekick in a horror movie, the one who rushes headfirst into trouble even as the audience begs, "Don't open that door!"

I lived in Quito for a total of five months between 2011 and 2013. During my time there I was either volunteering at Camal through CENIT or doing thesis fieldwork there, so the market usually came up in first conversations. I never met a Quiteño who was unfamiliar with the market. Everyone I met, with two exceptions, told me that Camal was dangerous. The first exception was the professor whose class I audited at the *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO). As an anthropologist herself, she understood that I was interested in the market *because* it was reputed to be dangerous. The second exception was a taxi driver who drove me to the airport, who was one of the few female taxi drivers in the city. She told me most people consider her job to be too dangerous for women. When I mentioned that I had been working on a project at Camal, she was completely unfazed. I like to think that this was because she was also tired of people warning her about danger. But maybe it was a coincidence.

The list of everyone else who did issue me warnings about Camal is extensive: store owners, fellow bus passengers, people I met at *discotecas*. With the exception of the professor

and taxi driver, their condemnation of Camal did not vary across class or gender. These strong reactions can partially be explained by the fact that I am a white U.S. American woman. I am petite, and during fieldwork many Quiteños told me that I looked even younger than my (very young) age at that time of twenty-one. Why would a small, foreign white girl wander off the tourist trail to interview vendors at a market in South Quito for a “school project”? Many of the older Quiteños I met had limited formal education, and even if they happened to have a high school or college degree, anthropology is not a popular course of study in Ecuador. Our discipline has bourgeois origins, and while learning about other cultures has many “real-world” applications, research encounters across lines of difference can be confusing on both sides of the exchange. One of the most prominent U.S. anthropologists of Andean markets, Mary Weismantel, describes an Ecuadorian colleague as “poking gentle fun at my *gringa* enthusiasm for working-class Latin America” (2001: 25). A similar dynamic probably influenced Quiteños’ incredulous reactions to my project at Camal.

Still, Quiteños’ strong reactions to the mention of Camal cannot be entirely explained by my positionality. Vendors at the market often complained that many Quiteños think their market is filled with criminals. Neighborhood officials confirmed that Camal has a reputation for being *peligroso*, or dangerous. My anthropology professor and a U.S. American former Peace Corps volunteer who worked in South Quito agreed that Camal is widely considered to be an insecure space. What kept me coming back to Camal was the conviction—backed up by the anecdotal and statistical evidence cited below—that bodies and property are not actually at a high risk of assault in the market, at least not compared to the rest of Quito, including in its beloved historic district. How could I explain what appeared to me like a wide gulf between perceptions and material reality?

There are myriad explanations for this apparent gap, which I divide into three general hypotheses (which are not mutually exclusive). First, it was possible that within the market, there actually *was* a high incidence of robberies, assaults, and other crime that as a naive outsider I was unaware of during fieldwork. Second, it was possible that within the market, some Quiteños might *feel* as if they are at risk for being assaulted or robbed. In this case it would be an issue of perceived danger instead of actual crimes. The third and final hypothesis was that many Quiteños describe Camal as “dangerous” as a codeword to express a more complicated or taboo concept.

As I will show in this chapter, my explanation for Camal’s reputation combines the latter two possibilities while arguing that the first (and most straightforward) hypothesis, that Camal is actually a crime-ridden place, is not accurate. Next, I explore why, although “danger” talk cannot be taken at face value, Camal’s relatively undisciplined space might *feel* dangerous for many Quiteños within the overall climate of insecurity in Quito. This is important because the most prominent contemporary ethnography of Andean markets, Weismantel’s *Cholas and Pistachos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes* (2001), is fairly unsympathetic to anyone who feels threatened within markets. Weismantel argues that many people, particularly foreign men, feel “queasy” in markets like Camal because the vendors’ autonomy disrupts normative schemes of racial and sexual subordination (2001: 22). She mocks a British travel writer whose market scenes are “permeated with a sense of unease” (2001: 23). In general, Weismantel’s perspective on markets deeply influenced my understanding of Camal, and her work is the primary inspiration for my own. I believe that Quiteños label Camal as “dangerous” in part to distance themselves from the market, because the historically abject space of the former slaughterhouse and the women who still work there threaten their identities as citizens of a modernizing nation.

Weismantel would likely agree that this coded language reflects racial-, gender-, and class-based prejudice.

At the same time, Weismantel is too dismissive of the other possible reasons why markets like Camal inspire fear, not just for foreigners but for many Quiteños. Like so many contemporary anthropologists, Weismantel makes her argument by using the most powerful figure on hand as a straw-man to build knowledge against: in this case, her straw-man is the “queasy” white male journalist. Race- class- and gender-based oppressions play important roles in creating Camal’s reputation, but they intertwine with many other factors that Weismantel largely overlooks. In this chapter, I seek to move beyond a simplistic pegging of Quiteños who describe Camal as products of a discriminatory society, and to move toward an interpretation that situates *all* local discourses about the market within attempts to find a secure location in the neoliberalizing economy. Before delving into the specifics of Quito and Camal, I frame the chapter by asking: why should anthropology take seriously popular dialogue about insecurity?

#### Anthropology of Insecurity: What is at Stake?

One of the fundamental purposes of anthropology is to “study man, and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is, the hold life has on him” (Malinowski 1922: 25). It is vital that anthropologists unpack popular dialogue surrounding insecurity because fear of crime has a fierce hold on many people across the globe. This is especially true in Latin America, where many “live their lives in a condition of generalized insecurity and fear of an assault, a robbery, or the threat of either” (Goldstein 2010: 496). It is hard to overstate the extent to which this state of “generalized insecurity” colors daily life in Quito and other Latin American metropolises, especially since underemployment and crime have ballooned in many cities over the past thirty years. Indeed, “some have compared the general climate of fear and suspicion with

that which typified the age of dictatorships in Latin America, in which a prevailing sense of personal insecurity colored daily life” (Goldstein 2010: 496). However, to date, scholarly focus on issues of insecurity have taken place more within policy-oriented disciplines such as International Relations and Political Science rather than in Anthropology. This is unfortunate, because as Goldstein notes:

Anthropology...is particularly well suited to offer a critical take on global security questions, given the discipline’s long-standing modus operandi of situating local realities within broader national and transnational contexts to examine the mutually constitutive effects of each on the other (2010: 489).

In addition to a methodology that allows anthropologists to observe and theorize about how global phenomena play out in diverse locales, anthropologists have a particular knack for making visible what is lurking underneath the surface of society. The tendency to take seriously what people say, while understanding that discourse and behavior often communicate in ways that go far beyond the literal, is especially important when it comes to interpreting popular discourse about crime. For example, in the United States the phrase “sketchy neighborhood” is often coded lingo for “neighborhood populated by people of color” (Strachan 2014). Anthropologists know that if we hope to untangle culture’s power-infused webs of meaning, it is vital that we pay attention to public discourse, but it is equally vital that we do not take public discourse at face value.

#### Crime in Camal and the Old Quarter

This is not to say that Quiteños’ constant discourse about *la inseguridad* is delusional; by almost any available standards, they live in a high-crime city. Recent State Department reports classify Quito’s crime situation as “critical,” whereas Santiago in Chile is described as “generally safe” (OSAC 2013). Underreporting is an obstacle to understanding the precise prevalence of crime. According a 2011 government survey Ecuadorians only reported about 15% of personal

robberies, primarily due to lack of trust in the judicial system and the police (INEC 2011). However, there is still a wealth of information available, and the Quito city government even has a specific bureau (the *Observatorio Metropolitano de Seguridad Ciudadana* or the OMSC) dedicated to collecting and organizing crime data.

According to several studies, the majority of Quiteños believe that robberies and assaults are the principal drivers of insecurity in their city (INEC 2011 & OMSC 2011). A survey found that 13.8% of Quiteños were victims of “forceful” robberies in 2011, while 7.5% of Quiteños were victims of robberies committed “without force” (such as a pick pocketing) (OMSC 2011: 16-17). Considering the previous statistic about how most robberies are not reported, the actual incidence of robberies is likely much higher. Another 2011 survey found that over 45% of participants in Quito and Guayaquil considered public insecurity and delinquency to be their nation’s biggest problems (“Encuesta” 2011).

If Quiteños bemoaned Camal as “dangerous” simply because it *is* one of the more crime-ridden corners of their generally insecure city, then this chapter would be a lengthy exercise in stating the obvious. But the twist is that Camal is not a place where very many crimes take place. The chart below includes OMSC’s 2013 crime statistics for Eloy Alfaro, the administrative zone that includes Camal. For the sake of comparison the chart also includes the Manuela Saenz zone, which encompasses Quito’s tourist-friendly *Centro Historico*, or Old Town. This comparison is intriguing considering that the Old Town is widely cherished as Quito’s gem. Quiteños frequently asked me if I liked their *Centro Historico* and encouraged me to visit the colonial churches and plazas.

	<b>Eloy Alfaro (includes Camal)</b>	<b>Manuela Saenz (Old Town)</b>
<i>Population</i>	438,447	218, 714

<i>Area</i>	58,844.8 km <sup>2</sup>	4,785.3km <sup>2</sup>
<i>Homicides</i>	21	56
<i>Robberies (includes muggings, home invasions, car robberies)</i>	2125	2637

Source: OMSC 2013

The chart reveals that Eloy Alfaro is larger in area and has nearly twice the population of the Old Quarter. However, Eloy Alfaro has less than half as many reported homicides, and over 500 fewer reported robberies. According to these statistics, the part of the city containing Camal is significantly safer than the Old Quarter. Perhaps Camal is a particularly dangerous site within the (relatively) safer administrative zone of Eloy Alfaro? But once again, according to OMSC’s data, this is not the case. Their annual report includes detailed, color-coded maps illustrating the density of crime in each administrative zone. There are five levels, ranging from low crime-density to high crime density. Camal is in a level-three area, signifying a “medium” level of crime. In contrast, many of Quito’s top attractions in the Historic District are in “red zones,” or level-five areas where crime is at the highest density. There are dozens of red zones scattered throughout the city.

A devil’s advocate might argue that even the most accurate statistic is not a mirror onto an indisputable truth. As Foucault illuminated in his treatise on “biopower,” statistics are never politically neutral, but rather they make a society “legible” so it can be categorized or altered (Foucault 1978: 139; Scott 1998: 3). Perhaps the municipal government calculates the statistics in a way that downplays incidents to create the impression of a safer city. Alternatively, what if

the OMSC figures are deflated for Camal because crime there is so rampant and the police are so corrupt that no one even bothers to report incidents?

However, all of my evidence from 38 interviews and nine weeks of fieldwork leads to a different conclusion: crime is not unheard of at Camal, but it is a relatively rare occurrence. Some vendors claimed that the market is generally dangerous because of “delinquents” from Colombia or the coast of Ecuador,<sup>2</sup> but rarely mentioned specific incidents of theft or assault. I asked several market administrators about crime at Camal, and they said that on average one cell phone theft is reported each week. Considering that the market is a large and crowded place with over two thousand vendors and many more customers, one cell phone per week is actually quite a small figure. Throughout my fieldwork, I never witnessed a crime, but I often asked vendors if any crimes had occurred at the market when I was absent. Perhaps the infamous market only lived up to its reputation when I was not looking? But no one ever had anything to report.

Victor, a middle-aged teacher at the local non-profit CENIT and a loyal Camal customer, was nervous about shopping at Camal when he first moved into the neighborhood nine years ago. He had heard bad things about the place. But since then, Victor has come to believe that the market is safe. The only incident at the market that Victor could recall was that his neighbor’s cell phone was once stolen from her handbag. But their other neighbor witnessed the theft, so she approached the thief and demanded that he return the phone to its owner. The thief followed her instructions and returned the phone. In contrast, over the five months total we lived in Quito together, my friend Julie was violently robbed in the Old Town and had her pocket picked there on another occasion. I was once walking through the Old Town when a stranger grabbed my torso and didn’t let go until I screamed. In light of the statistical, ethnographic, and anecdotal evidence above, why is Camal denounced as dangerous while the Old Town, a place where more

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<sup>2</sup> The tendency for vendors to blame Camal’s dangerous reputation on outsiders is explored further in Chapter Four.



crimes actually occur, is beloved? When it comes to danger in Quito, how can we account for the wide gap between public discourse and statistics?

I believe that many Quiteños feel safe in Old Town because the space feels disciplined. That is, the Old Town has well-maintained physical infrastructure, heavy police surveillance, and is “legible” to outsiders. Flipped around, these are also three reasons why Camal feels dangerous. In the section that follows, I explore how these spatial and organizational differences shape many Quiteños’ perceptions of danger in both spaces.

### Infrastructure in Old Town and Camal

As I described in the previous chapter, since the mid-1990s the Old Town has been subject to a “revitalization campaign” (Dowl 2008). Over the past twenty years this effort has restored the Old Town’s colonial churches, plazas and storefronts, improved sanitation services, and modernized public transit. Today, many storefronts in the Old Town are coated with colorful paint, and the narrow cobblestone streets are well-marked. The plazas are relatively free of trash, and at night colorful lights illuminate the facades of churches and other historic buildings.

In contrast, the infrastructure within and surrounding Camal has been neglected for decades. At the same time, roughly the last thirty years, the market has expanded enormously without any sign of long-term planning. This situation of neglect coupled with expansion is common in Andean markets. Weismantel writes that in a USAID-sponsored policy study of Ecuador, the researchers “were baffled by the state’s refusal to provide basic infrastructure and sanitation for the produce and meat markets that feed most of the country’s residents...so perverse a strategy could only be explained by ‘a deeply ingrained bias’ towards the markets and those who worked there” (Tschirley and Riley 1990, quoted in Weismantel 2001: 39). Local politicians in Quito have vowed to renovate the Camal for many years. Hilda, a potato vendor,

explained: “they [officials and politicians] have always been saying, ‘we’re going to renovate, rebuild.’ They never do it.” The sidewalk that borders the front entrance is ripe with decaying rubbish. Bright graffiti embellishes crumbling concrete walls. After the chain-link gates are shut each night, scattered streetlights illuminate the market stall’s uneven roofs. For passengers whizzing by on a nighttime bus headed out of town, Camal flits past as a shadowy tent city.

For many Quiteños, the contrast between Old Town’s excellent infrastructure and Camal’s disrepair makes the market *feel* like the place where crimes are more likely to be committed. This is an interesting twist on the “broken windows” theory of criminal behavior. In their 1982 *Atlantic Monthly* article “Broken Windows,” social scientists George Kelling and James Wilson argue that neighborhoods are vulnerable to crime if they do not “exercise effective dominion over their space.” If a neighborhood does not claim its territory by fixing broken windows and “asserting informal social control,” criminals will supposedly take note of their vulnerability. In other words, “an unrepaired broken window sends a signal that a community does not care about itself, and thus cannot defend against a criminal invasion” (Herbert and Brown 2006: 759). According to this logic, Camal’s crumbling, graffitied concrete *makes* the market more vulnerable to crime than the tidy Old Quarter.

Over the past three decades, the broken windows theory has gained popularity around the world. In fact, “if any thinking about crime can be said to have entered the ‘common sense,’ it is this theory” (Harcourt 2001, quoted in Herbert and Brown 2006: 759). But, to clarify: broken windows *do not cause crime*, at least not directly, and the theory has been disproved again and again (Greene 1999; Harcourt and Ludwig 2001; Harcourt 2009). Indeed, the comparison between crime statistics from Camal and Old Town is yet another example that shatters the supposed “connection between disorder and crime” (Herbert and Brown 2006: 759). In New

York City, adherence to the broken windows theory helped to institutionalize racial profiling without reducing crime (Williams 2014: 10). Still, the theory contains a simple grain of truth that is relevant for Camal: "landscapes emit messages" (Herbert and Brown 2006: 758). Landscapes say different things to different people (Sassen 1993: 46), but they do speak.

Perceptions of disorder are socially constructed. What a disorderly landscape looks like varies across cultures, and one person's chaos may be another person's calm. However, such perceptions are still real and influence people's behavior. So while it has been proven that broken windows do not increase deviance, it is possible that in some contexts, broken windows inspire fear. In fact, "the notion that visual signs of neighbourhood disorder exert a direct influence on *fear of crime* has a good deal of prima facie empirical support" (Brunton-Smith 2011: 887, emphasis added). In this sense, I believe that many Quiteños are strongly influenced by the logic of broken windows without ever knowing the theory by name. Built into the theory is the "geographic assumption...that the world can be divided into known, controllable insiders and unknown, dangerous outsiders" (Herbert and Brown 2006: 760). There are criminals who seek out communities that appear vulnerable, and then there are law-abiding potential victims who must protect their territory. In a fast-growing, high-crime city like Quito, many residents make exactly that kind of division in order to create a sense of control in the seemingly out-of-control urban landscape.

In Quito, the "unknown, dangerous" outsiders are typically referred to as *delincuentes*, or delinquents. During my fieldwork, when I was about to enter public space--for example, as I exited a taxi or left a restaurant--I was often advised to be on the lookout for delinquents. Goldstein writes that in Bolivia, "'delinquents'...embody the general unease that people (of all races and social classes but especially the indigenous poor) feel as they confront the perils of

daily life in a condition of pervasive poverty, inequality, and personal disempowerment” (2010: 496). For many Quiteños, the public spaces that inspire the most “general unease” are spaces with graffiti, trash and crumbling concrete. Unlike the Old Town, Camal does not visually communicate discipline, and thus gives the impression of an out-of-control space.

### Surveillance and Discipline in Old Town and Camal

Another factor that shapes many Quiteños’ distinct perceptions of the Old Town and Camal is the degree of formal surveillance and discipline exerted in each area. In the Old Town, an “overwhelming” police presence creates a visibly hierarchical system of surveillance (Swanson 2007: 718). In the most tourist-friendly areas, there are clumps of armed police officers or soldiers on nearly every corner. Many businesses in the Old Town also hire their own guards. As of the mid-2000s private security was one of the fastest growing industries in Latin America (Ungar 2007: 20).

In contrast at Camal vendors rely on themselves for surveillance and discipline rather than on the mechanisms of the state, and the channels of power are more like twisting rivulets that weave from stall to stall. I never saw a police officer inside the market. Which isn’t to say that no one is watching; at the market there are always “eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street” (Jacobs 1961: 35). Vendors are constantly on the lookout for behavior they consider deviant, and many vendors have been known to attack thieves with broomsticks. Some vendors’ associations encourage their members to chase down and beat thieves, or at least hold onto them until security arrives. Graciela, a vendor who runs a food counter she inherited from her mother, had strong opinions on this topic.

Graciela is a stout woman with wide gaps in her toothy smile, and she has worked at Camal for 28 years. Throughout our interview, she was expertly and forcefully chopping a large

slab of meat with a cleaver. Specks of blood flew from her knife and dotted the counter. Graciela explained that each vendor has her own way of dealing with thieves. “If someone steals from me,” she said, “if they sit down to eat and then they don’t pay, I give them a little punch. It’s only happened to me twice. Other women, when someone robs them, they say, ‘they robbed me, they robbed me!’ [high-pitched voice]. I give them a smack. There is no free food.” To a large extent, vendors like Graciela play by their own rules.

The security guards at Camal are typically young men armed with machetes or batons who are hired by the vendor’s associations. Each guard is charged with protecting an enormous area of the market. Some guards have walkie-talkies to coordinate with each other, but others do not. They sometimes dress a little flashier than male vendors, perhaps by wearing brightly colored button-down shirts or a shiny belt. But they have no official uniforms. The guards are not employed by a large security firm, and several told me that they have little training or oversight.

However, Camal’s guards and vendors like Graciela are quite distinct from Cochabamba’s vigilantes, whose violent performances of justice are chronicled by Daniel Goldstein in his book *Outlawed: Between Security and Rights in a Bolivian City* (2012). Goldstein describes how residents of peripheral neighborhoods have turned to lynching presumed criminals as a method to exert social control in the vacuum left by a corrupt and incompetent state. In areas of Cochabamba plagued by frequent crimes against people who already have so few material belongings, murdering *delincuentes* is one of the few collective community events (Goldstein 2012: 7). In contrast, at Camal few crimes actually take place, and vendors are not particularly united or well organized in their responses to incidents that do occur. The president of the second largest vendors’ association (and the apparent rival of the *8 de marzo* or Women’s Day association) told me that they had been attempts to better organize vendors

against theft. He claimed that these efforts failed because the women who work at Camal are “mediocre people.” Several vendors told me that vigilante justice only occurs in “the country” among “*los indigenas*,” or that at Camal only vendors on the market’s lower patio attack thieves (the patio is populated by more indigenous vendors than the other sections). Vendors like Graciela observe and discipline independently or in solidarity with a few others, but there is no collective ethos of vigilante justice at Camal that I could observe.

Camal’s four municipal administrators work from a spare office at the end of a long, graffiti-covered hallway that situates them relatively far away from any of the stalls. During their meetings with vendors’ associations, I witnessed administrators admonishing vendors for their observed lack of professionalism. Administrators criticized vendors for making social visits in their stalls, not wearing their association’s uniform (a smock and hat) and failing to put lids on their garbage bins. During one meeting, the head administrator emphatically announced that “social visits are fine, but they are for the home! The market is exclusively for selling.” This statement is so disconnected from the reality of Camal that it was almost comical, and the vendors seemed unfazed even as the administrators threatened to punish them for their infractions with fines or suspensions.

There are over two thousand vendor at Camal and only four administrators, which means that organized surveillance and discipline is spotty at best. In my experience, even the administrators’ office did not feel like a particularly disciplined space. I remember one afternoon when I walked into their office to do a long-awaited interview. Just inside the door were three young men, all about twenty years old and with spiked hair. They were huddled around the electric outlet, and one was holding a loud, vibrating electric needle. Attached to the needle was vial filled with a dark red liquid that was either ink or blood. The young man was giving his

companion a tattoo. No one volunteered an explanation until I asked during the interview. Apparently one of the young men was an administrator's son. The office, like the rest of the market, felt like a space where people unapologetically blend official business with more "domestic" activities.

### Seeing Camal "Like a State"

A final theory that can bring together the effects of poor infrastructure and the lack of formal surveillance at Camal is James Scott's concept of "legibility" from his book *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998: 2). For many Quiteños, the Camal market is not a "legible" space; that is, the terrain and socio-cultural practices are difficult to abstract and make comprehensible to anyone who is not deeply familiar with the space. In any given environment, entire worlds fall outside the brackets of what an abstract representation can capture. That is, no amount of detail in a map can capture all of reality; nature, human or otherwise is too excessive (Raffles 2002). Life always spills over the edge, but it *overflows* at Camal.

Creating any kind map of Camal would not be feasible for an outsider (I have tried and failed many times). The market has dozens of sections and levels, which are not labeled or laid out in a replicable pattern. There are unguarded entrances and secluded corners, making it is impossible to keep track of who comes in and out. The environment of uncertainty is frustrating for shoppers as well as vendors, who often bemoaned how their space is totally open to loiterers and vagrants. Finally, as I have described so far in this chapter, Camal is filled with incredibly *specific* and *idiosyncratic* social interactions that are difficult to make legible through abstractions or predictions.

As a result, the market feels extra “excessive.” In other words, the market feels like a space where anything could happen. On one occasion I sat down to eat French fries in the dining area, only to discover a man sleeping off a hangover underneath the table. I was once interviewing a cheese vendor when a large Mariachi band burst through the side entrance and began serenading a butcher across the aisle. Shouting matches occasionally broke out between vendors and customers. I sometimes noticed dismembered chunks of animal on the sidewalk. Many unpredictable and particular events happen at Camal that usually do not involve crime. However, the sense of possibility at Camal often provokes fear, rather than the inspiration that is sometimes found in unscripted community spaces (Gagné 2011). In an insecure city, everyone loses the benefit of the doubt. The unknown becomes scary by default.



## Chapter Four

### **Camal Vendors' Negotiations with Modernity "Beyond Resistance"**

Most of my thesis is dedicated to understanding Camal's reputation as "dangerous." In this chapter I focus on how, through their own stories and actions, vendors create their identities as vendors and make a space for themselves within the city's food system. I believe that to protect their presence in Quito's economy and create positive individual identities, vendors use strategies that can be understood using the three types of oppositional behaviors identified by geographer Cindi Katz: resilience, reworking, and resistance (2004: 242). These broad, overlapping categories provide enough structure to see the patterns in vendors' complex behaviors, while leaving room for excessive and contingent human nature. This structure also pushes back against romantic storylines about modernity that pit "little people" against presumably monolithic enemies. I agree with Katz that "finding resistance in each discursive or other cultural practice that might be construed as autonomous" is ultimately "a cheap thrill, usually voyeuristic, a balm to critics in the global north that may be no less exoticizing than earlier renditions of Orientalism" (2004: 240, 242). Furthermore, such one-dimensional readings cast big concepts like capitalism, globalization, and modernity as false gods rather than human creations. In reality, as Erik Harms notes, "even large-scale trends are always reconfigured by the micro politics, economic maneuvering, and identity management of local actors navigating extra-local fields of power" (Harms 2010: 8). This chapter examines vendors' specific and diverse micropolitics, economic maneuvering and identity management, especially as they engage with the concepts of modernity and danger.

As Chapter One illuminated, the pursuit of modernity has been a thread running throughout Ecuador's history, especially since the mid-nineteenth century. Anthropologist Lisa Rofel notes in *Other Modernities*, her book about post-Maoist China:

Precisely because they have been the objects of a world history that has enabled the West to distinguish itself as that history's principal subject, people in China and other non-Western countries enact modernity in a form that must overcome this historical difference. (1999: 9)

As I argued in Chapter Three, Camal is stigmatized as "dangerous" in part because many Quiteños perceive the market as a "traditional" space where goods are sold in a "traditional" manner. Unlike the revamped San Francisco market in the Old Town, Camal is not reenacting Quito's cultural heritage of markets for tourists to consume as "living history." Rather, Camal is seen as an incongruous, threatening relic of Quito's pre-modernity that is stubbornly wedged into the present.

Anthropologists and other critical thinkers have long established that modernity is not a real destination that all societies eventually arrive at via a tidy progression. Rather, "modernity exists as a narrative imaginary; it is a story people tell themselves about themselves in relation to others" (Rofel 1999: 13). Camal is just as tied into the global movement of people, products and ideas as any other place in Quito. But to reiterate from Chapter Two: Camal is both a physical space and a web of power-infused narratives tied to layers of history. The fact that Camal isn't *really* "behind" anywhere else does not erase the fact that many Quiteños understand the market to be an antiquated and perhaps embarrassing throwback. While the physical space of Camal and the web of narratives that surround Camal are separate entities, they are not independent of each other. The materiality of the market at least partially informs the stories, and the stories shape the material reality of the market. In this chapter, I explore how vendors work through those perceptions and realities of danger and modernity.

## Resistance

Resistance is comprised of acts of subversion motivated by an ideology that questions social, political, or economic norms. According to Katz, “practices of resistance draw on and produce a critical consciousness to confront and redress historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression and exploitation at various scales” (2004: 251). In Quito there is a deep association in the popular imagination between markets and indigenous resistance movements, even though the majority of street and market vendors do not identify as indigenous (Middleton 2003: 99). This is partially due to the history of “political affinity” between vendors and indigenous peoples throughout the Andes (Middleton 2003: 100), as is chronicled by Jose Maria Arguedas in his classic novel *Deep Rivers* (1958). In 1990 many vendors from Quito participated in the landmark indigenous uprising in the highlands. Quito’s vendors were also involved in the wider protests that led to the coups against President Abdala Bucaram in 1997 and President Jamil Mahuad in 2000 (Middleton 2003: 99).

The majority of vendors I interviewed supported President Rafael Correa, who created his own political party *Alianza PAIS* and has been in office since 2007. Perhaps because they believe they are now more represented by their political leadership, vendors were rarely interested in discussing their involvement in strikes or public demonstrations. Maria, a hominy vendor, did talk at length about a vendors’ strike that occurred in 1999:

We did a strike there in the Plaza Grande, because they were going to remove us from the markets, to privatize the markets. We said that, from here, we will not move, and we sat so the trolley could not pass. The *Plaza Grande* was full of vendors from all of the markets...we spent the whole day there, until we were given an audience with the President [Mahuad].

I could not pinpoint in the historical record the specific strike that Maria described, because 1999 was one of the most politically and economically tumultuous years in Ecuador’s history. As

President Mahuad implemented austerity measures and began the country's transition to the U.S. dollar, the already-troubled national economy spiraled into freefall (Matthews et al. 2006: 92). In response to reduced subsidies, taxi drivers blocked Quito's major intersections, indigenous groups blockaded highways, and many other sectors of society protested or went on strike (Tribune News Service 1999; Millan 1999). One element of Mahuad's proposed reforms was the privatization of failing state-run enterprises, which may have included the system of municipally owned markets. During the 1990s, Quito's department of markets was running a deep deficit as its revenues failed to keep pace with administrative expenditures (Middleton 2003: 94). As Maria described it, under Mahuad's plans Camal would have become

a shopping center like the *Recreo*...so we wrote some documents that said 'no to the privatization!' Because we are people who want to work, but not under anyone, we did not want to be anyone's employees. Here [at Camal] we work independently, with our own money. We told them we would fix the market with our own money.

Like many vendors, Maria relished her independence and actively resisted an economic model that would make her someone's employee within a large corporation. Maria told me that as a result of the 1999 protests, vendors reached a compromise in which they promised to renovate their markets themselves and to be more polite to the customers. Thus, even in their strike, a quintessential act of "resistance," vendors were negotiating about how they would rework their own spaces and identities to fit into wider notions of what a "modern" market should be like.

### Physical Reworking

Katz describes reworking as "practices that alter the conditions of people's existence to enable more workable lives and create more viable terrains of practice" (2004: 247). If resistance is driven by an oppositional ideology, projects of reworking "tend to be driven by explicit recognition of problematic conditions and to offer focused, often pragmatic responses to them. They generally operate on the same plane and scale that a problem is experienced" (Katz 2004:

247). Of the three strategies described in this chapter, reworking was the one I most frequently observed at Camal. As the hominy vendor Maria explained, to survive the neoliberal reform period in the late 1990s vendors agreed that “we would attend to them [the customers] better. Since then we have fixed the lights, the dining tables for customers, and the floor.” Many vendors, in different areas of the market, described how they organized with neighboring *puestos* (stalls) or their associations to pool money and renovate their sections.

It is unclear to me whether vendors’ efforts were a direct result of any agreements with the municipality. I would guess that it was more part of a broader trend, in which vendors took on greater responsibility for maintaining and improving the physical space in vacuum left by the state’s neglect. Regardless, Maria explained that in 2010, “we all put together the money to improve our section, we each put in three hundred dollars. We hired a contractor and an electrician. Before, it was so ugly.” The potato vendor Hilda described how with each municipal election cycle there was a new round of promises to renovate the market, but once the elections are over, “they never do it.” So instead, she and the other potato vendors in her row “struggled together to build new *puestos* of cement with their own money.” Each vendor contributed three hundred U.S. dollars, and Hilda was pleased by the results: “they are very nice, very sturdy. No one else here has *puestos* like this.” I often heard vendors describe how their section of the market was absolutely “*feo*,” or ugly, before they took matters into their own hands. Maria and Hilda both described a kind of privatization-by-default, through which vendors organized themselves in such a way that drew on both collectivist ideas about self-determination and more neoliberal models of individual entrepreneurialism. Indeed, under neoliberalism subjects govern themselves “not so much in the ‘absence’ of the state...[but] in the presence of state power and authority manifest in calls for personal responsibility, empowerment and individual choice”

(Pudup 2008: 1230). As Foucault reminded us, state power can become so diffused and internalized that it is hard to discern whether vendors' renovations were oppositional behavior or business as usual (or maybe a combination of both).

Almost all vendors, even those who had not recently renovated their areas, openly took pride in how they displayed their goods. One day early in my fieldwork, I walked by a produce vendor whose stall reminded me of a still life painting. The wooden *puesto* was painted bright blue, and tall stacks of oranges and tomatoes formed elaborate pyramids. An overflowing sack of shiny chili peppers and piles of dark grapes reminded me of a postcard. I told the vendor, whose name I later found out was Lucracia, that her stall was beautiful. "I know," she responded, before adding "*gracias*" as an afterthought.

Another vendor, Lorena, insisted that I take photos of her stall from every possible angle, and she checked to make sure I had snapshots of every fruit that she sold. Lorena was a twenty-eight year old *mestiza* with dyed hair and dark eyeliner who had taken over the stall from her grandmother a few months earlier. Lorena emigrated to Belgium as a teenager, where she worked cleaning offices for nine years. She returned to Ecuador because she felt isolated in the more individualistic European culture, but now Camal seemed provincial to her. Lorena's two children came to work with her during their summer break, but once they were gone I often saw her sitting on a plastic stool, playing with her phone or staring into space with a bored expression. One of her outlets that she took clear pleasure in was arranging the fruit that she sold. Lorena was unique among vendors in that she carefully placed crisp white paper towels between the produce and the shelves of her *puesto*. The stall was meticulous. She arranged massive, angular papayas into a pyramid with four round coconuts in front, and the result was geometric art. Some Quiteños saw Camal as a "cultural and economic backwater" (Sassen 1993: 33), and

Lorena may have partially agreed with that perspective. But she was resilient in how she reworked her space to find joy within it.

### Rhetorical Reworking

Camal's vendors are often resourceful and creative, but they are not homogenous and they are not saints. Many women at Camal deride their fellow vendors by casting the same webs of meaning that other Quiteños use to stigmatize the market as a whole. As Harms observes, "even people relegated to the edge of ideal social categories participate in the reproduction of the ideals that put them on the edge" (2010: 36). If social subjects "distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" (Bourdieu 1984: 6), many vendors were quick to differentiate themselves from those *other* vendors. In conversations, vendors often reworked binaries to lodge themselves in the superior categories and their fellow vendors in inferior categories. To turn to Harms again: "everyday social action emerges not as a simple rejection of false binaries, but instead as a negotiation of the contours provided by the binaries themselves" (2010: 30). I found that vendors often reworked the contours around themselves in very particular ways.

Some vendors mobilized ideas about religion to present themselves as superior to other vendors. Mariana, a juice vendor, was emphatic about how being evangelical had made her into a better person. Once as we walked together past one of Camal's many Catholic shrines, Mariana explained to me what was wrong with the candles, fake flowers and plaster statue of Christ:

That is idol worship. So is what they do in Otavalo [indigenous community]. That is a statue. That's not god. God is the spirit. When I first went to a Christian church, I was dismayed by the simplicity of it, the plainness. Once I realized why it was so, I thanked God for showing me.

Mariana, accustomed to the sumptuousness of a Catholic church, at first did not understand the evangelical church's understated interior. However, as she came to "know God" she learned to appreciate the "sublimated, refined, disinterested" aesthetics (Bourdieu 1984: 7). The uncluttered

simplicity of the evangelical church now appeals to Mariana's tastes, which she sees as more dignified. In her comments above, she lumped together Catholic vendors and those who engage in indigenous practices into the unfortunate category of "idol-worshippers."

A year earlier, Mariana had converted Maria, the hominy vendor whose *puesto* was beside hers, from Catholicism to evangelical Christianity. However, Maria still did not go to church every week. Mariana explained: "She's a new Christian. She is just learning. It is like she is in first grade. I have seen her praying to little dolls." Mariana imitated someone clasping her hands together and worshiping at a tiny shrine, and then she smiled at me. In this troubling conversation, she cast her close friend Maria as no better than the supposedly childlike and superstitious indigenous people of Otavalo.

Other vendors used religion to distinguish between their inferior old selves and their current selves. A flower and plant seller named Estela explained that until ten years ago she was "*grosera*," meaning vulgar or rude, and that she did not know how to treat customers. She used to "have a good time." Then Estela came to know God, and went from being a non-practicing Catholic to a believer. Through God she was transformed, becoming more "refined" and "polite." Perhaps as a slight jab at the evangelicals and their conversion process, Estela told me that "you don't have to change religions to know God."

The *mestiza* vendors I interviewed often used racialized notions of dirt and cleanliness to distinguish themselves from the vendors they referred to as "migrants" or "*indigenas*." A middle-aged, light-skinned Quiteña vendor named Rosario told me that

There are lots of migrants here...they are really from the country! They sell herbs, but with a pile of apples in the middle! They are very disorganized, that is their way. They are dirty, their smocks are dirty [she gestures to her own smock to show the contrast]. You should not buy their food, it is not healthy.



In a quintessential example of dirt as “matter out of place,” vendors who presumably mixed their apples and their herbs were dirty, and their food was therefore dangerous (Douglas 1966).

Swanson notes that among elite planners in Quito, “the urban renewal discourse of cleanliness and modern progress is projected against the image of the perceived ‘backward,’ ‘rural’ and ‘dirty Indian’ (Swanson 2007: 709). It is not only elites who hold these views, but also *mestiza* vendors at Camal who work side-by-side with indigenous women.

At the same time, vendors who wore indigenous dress sometimes had an advantage over their *mestiza* counterparts. Victor, the teacher from the non-profit CENIT, told me he prefers to buy from Camal’s *indigena* vendors. Victor grew up on his family’s small farm in rural Ecuador, but as a young adult he spent many years working abroad in Germany and the United States. Today Victor lives near the market in South Quito, and he addresses his favorite indigenous vendors as his “aunts.” Victor said that these women remind him of his childhood, which is interesting considering that his family lives in a rural area but does not consider themselves to be indigenous. Victor’s nostalgia is directed towards indigenous women perhaps because he seems them as the most genuine representatives of the “traditional” Ecuador that he longed for during his many years abroad (de la Cadena 1995). Victor also believes that the indigenous women grow their own produce, which means “the prices are lower and the fruits and vegetables are fresher.” Victor’s inclination towards the *indigena* vendors is interesting, especially considering that very few vendors, *indigena* or otherwise, actually grow their own produce. Victor flips the stereotype that places indigenous women closer to the “dirt” to frame them as the authentic cultivators of the land (Orlove 1998).

In his study of urban “edge-dwellers,” Harms found that some of Ho Chi Minh City’s women food vendors intentionally dressed in peasant clothes when they went into the city center

to sell their goods. They did not wear peasant clothes at home but chose to perform rural culture for their urban customers, because “the difference is what makes the exchange desirable. Urbanities want to buy from imagined peasants specifically because they link certain foodstuffs with imagined ideals of peasant purity” (Harms 2010: 57). I do not know if any of Camal’s vendors who wore indigenous dress did so to gain a competitive advantage. Many of the indigenous vendors were most comfortable expressing themselves in Kichwa, which I do not speak. These vendors were often less friendly to me initially, perhaps because of the language barrier or a historically based inclination to be wary of outsiders. Regardless, the result was that our conversations were often less in-depth. Their strategies for economic success and identity management, which are probably quite diverse, for the most part remain unclear to me.

One exception was a produce vendor named Rosita. She grew up speaking primarily Kichwa with her family, who grew potatoes on their small plot of land in the highland province of Chimborazo. Rosita became fluent in Spanish as a young adult, and had long dark hair that often framed a wide grin. I spent a lot of time at her stall, especially after we started exchanging gifts of her fruit and my chocolate chip cookies. Rosita wore the long, narrow black skirt typical of women from indigenous highland communities, often with a sweatshirt and her vendors’ association sky blue smock. I was once chatting with Rosita when she suddenly paused, widening her eyes and raising her eyebrows in a theatrical expression of fear. She gestured with a tilt of her head to an Afro-Ecuadorian boy who was crossing in front of her stall. “Thief,” she whispered to me. He was skinny and about thirteen years old.

Most vendors I encountered, regardless of their own racial identity, were openly prejudiced against Afro-Ecuadorians, especially Afro-Ecuadorian males. Historically Afro-Ecuadorians have not even been included in popular understandings of race and *mestizaje* in

Ecuador. They thus “constitute the ultimate Other, some sort of historical accident, a noise in the ideological system of nationality, a pollution in the Ecuadorian gene pool” (Rahier 2013: 24). The majority of Afro-Ecuadorians descend from Colombians who migrated to the northern Ecuadorian coastal province of Esmeraldas in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rahier 2013: 1). Many of their ancestors were slaves on coastal haciendas and sugar plantations. I encountered few Afro-Ecuadorians in Camal or South Quito in general, as Quito’s Afro-Ecuadorian population is concentrated in the city’s Northern fringes (Feinstein Center: 15). The Afro-Ecuadorians who do work in Camal are concentrated in the lower, uncovered platform, and primarily sell seafood and coconut water.

Vendors at Camal often associated Afro-Ecuadorians and Colombians immigrants of all races, most of whom are refugees from their country’s long civil war. Estela, the plant and flower vendor, told me that “the thieves arrived about eight years ago. It happened when they opened the border with Colombia. The thieves come from Colombia and the coast.” Many vendors directly stated that the “thieves” and “delinquents” at the market were *los negros*, “the blacks,” and Colombians. I was struck by how most vendors had no qualms about engaging in blatant prejudice against a racial minority and refugees. An American ex-pat who lived in South Quito for many years told me that middle and upper class Ecuadorians often held similar views, but they were subtler about expressing them.

Mariana, the evangelical juice vendor who ridiculed “idol-worshippers,” had the most nuanced view on Colombian immigrants that I encountered at the market:

You know from the dialect that they are Colombians... They [Quiteños] say, I won't give you work, so they [Colombians] steal. Some Colombians have started bakeries, honest work. I see that. Not all the Colombians are bad. But they are *avispados* [clever].

Mariana acknowledged that prejudice against Colombian refugees is based on generalizations, but like many Ecuadorians, she still sees them as conniving characters who merit suspicion. A study by Tufts' Feinstein International Center found that "Colombians face discrimination in Ecuadorian society and its fragile economy because they are believed to have strong sales and customer service skills, and are thus perceived as illegitimate competition" (2012: 2). Several middle and upper class Quiteños told me that Camal is "dangerous" because of the shrewd and manipulative vendors, while many vendors explained that Quito in general is "dangerous" because of the arrival of the sly Colombians and Afro-Ecuadorians. Everyone seemed to have their own wily "Other" to hold responsible for social problems.

### Resilience

So far I have described how vendors engaged in resistance through strikes and protests, and how they physically reworked the market to make their stalls appear more modern. Vendors also rhetorically reworked social binaries to place themselves in positions of superiority. The final strategy is resilience, which can be described as "restorative and strengthening acts" or the "recuperation of dignity in a range of small transactions" (Katz 2004: 242, 246). I understand vendors' attentiveness to customers and personalized form of exchange to be a form of resilience. In Chapter Three I explored how rising crime has led many Quiteños to become more distrusting of strangers, including Camal's vendors. Néstor García Canclini notes that "the violence and public insecurity, the incomprehensibility of the city...leads us to search for selective forms of sociability in domestic intimacy and in trusting encounters" (1995: 208). Vendors at Camal are resilient in that they have maintained and adapted their highly social form of economic exchange even as Quiteños in general have become more alienated from each other. To illuminate this form of resilience, I engage with Nana Okura Gagné's 2011 article "Eating

Local in a U.S. City: Reconstructing ‘Community’—a Third Place—in a Global Neoliberal Economy.” Camal is vastly different from the Washington, DC farmers’ market Gagné studies, and the food marketed in each place reflects very different positions within the globalized and industrialized agricultural economy. However, both markets are places where vendors take advantage of their position on the “edge” between tradition and modernity to strategically flip between gift and commodity systems of exchange. That is, Camal’s vendors oscillate from one model to another in response to specific pressures and opportunities.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) are two of the theorists who have most deeply shaped how anthropologists have historically understood the diverse functions of gift and commodity exchange in human societies. Both Marx and Mauss saw capitalism as alienating producers and consumers, as well as alienating workers from the products of their labor. Mauss, in common with other social scientists of the disillusioned World War I generation, thought he had found an alternative “gift-based” model among certain indigenous and small-scale societies. Mauss was seduced by the romantic notion that in these societies exchange took place only in the form of gifts, which functioned to reinforce social bonds rather than to accumulate material wealth (1950).

The ideas of both Marx and Mauss have been extensively unpacked by social scientists, who have arrived at a general consensus that in reality all forms of exchange are both social *and* economic practices that are shaped by particular cultural contexts (Gagné 2011: 281). However, the pure notions of the gift and the commodity are still important to consider in the context of Camal for various reasons. As Gagné notes, “despite the seemingly ‘antiquated’ insights of the Maussian and Marxian theoretical paradigms, we should not conflate the utility of the theoretical distinction between gift and commodity with its phenomenological significance in

the local contexts we study” (2011: 281). In simpler terms, the “gift economy/capitalist economy” binary is outdated as a theoretical tool (just like the “tradition/modernity” binary), but it still shapes how people on the ground understand their worlds. Furthermore, some forms of exchange are clearly more social than others, or are social in different ways. A grocery store cashier cannot hand out free gifts of food to customers, even to the customers whom she really likes. In contrast, at Camal gift giving is a structured element of the vendor-customer interaction. The quintessential social gesture of the gift is embedded within the economic exchange (Mauss 1950).

The most obvious way that exchange at Camal reflects a gift economy is the *llapa* (also spelled *yapa*). The word means “that which was added to the principal thing” or “little something extra added as a gift” in Kichwa (Gillet 1939: 94). Variations of the *llapa* can be found in other Latin American countries including Peru, Argentina, and Brazil. In fact, *llapa* entered the lexicon of the U.S. American Deep South via the Spanish Quarter of New Orleans and was transformed by an encounter with French into *lagniapp*. Mark Twain wrote that *lagniapp* is the “equivalent of the thirteenth roll in a 'baker's dozen.’” In 1939 American linguist Joseph E. Gillet noted that the *lagniapp*’s “continued existence [in the American South] seems to depend mainly on the custom of giving small gratuities in-kind in small stores, mostly to children, and perhaps the impersonal chain-store will destroy it” (93). Gillet’s prediction about the demise of the *lagniapp* in the “impersonal chain-store” was accurate, though in the DC farmers’ market Gagné studied the *lagniapp* was making a comeback.

Farmers at the DC market gave “personalized” discounts and free snacks to customers and received thoughtful gifts from regulars (Gagné 2011: 287). Participants in the DC market were actively trying to create a more reciprocal form of exchange that went against the grain of

the dominant economic culture of the United States. For example, one customer said he likes the “fresh produce and enjoying the ambiance and experience of the market,” and especially the opportunity to socialize with farmers and neighbors (2011: 283). He experienced supermarkets “as purely economic, a socially alienated arena in which individuals are primarily private consumers,” whereas the farmers’ market is “a space of renegotiation that can incorporate seemingly antiethical domains of business and sociality” (Gagné 2011: 286). In contrast, at Camal the social aspect of economic exchange is a norm grounded in the historical and cultural context of the Ecuadorian Andes. Even as their society as a whole becomes more alienated, vendors continue to socially connect with their customers—or at least with those customers with whom vendors consider themselves to be in social relationship. This excludes the vendors’ own ‘Others,’ like the Afro-Ecuadorians, with whom their relationship is more purely a matter of economic exchange.

The *llapa* has persisted in markets like Camal, likely in diverse forms but seemingly without interruption, for centuries. In fact, the *llapa* speaks to the cultural and economic legacy of the Incan Empire. Rather than conquering new territories through military force, the Incans often “employed kinship-based ideologies of gift giving, feasting, and other forms of reciprocity to recruit a large number of Andean chiefdoms into its expansive redistributive economy” (Hornborg 2014: 812). Today, the *llapa* is the “little extra” that Camal’s vendors give their customers to create a bond and build loyalty. For example, if a customer purchases ten tomatoes, the vendor will throw into an extra two for free. When someone buys a bag of potatoes, the vendor might pile on so many extras that they round out of the top of the sack like a snow cone.

Maria, the hominy vendor, always began transactions with customers by making them a small, overstuffed plastic bag of her product to snack on with a tiny plastic spoon as she prepared

the rest of their order. In another corner of the market, Mercedes sold *chocho*, an ancient Ecuadorian legume recently hailed by the BBC as the next “super food” (Pruszewicz 2012). As she absentmindedly arranged her *chocho* into tidy pyramids with a small plastic shovel, Mercedes explained that when a customer buys a big bag or has children in tow, she always gives a *llapa*. When I asked why, she chuckled and said, somewhat incredulously, “Otherwise the children will cry!” During fieldwork, nearly every vendor who I eventually interviewed initiated our relationship with a small gift, often an orange. Vendors constantly shared with each other as well, trading everything from fresh fruit smoothies to childcare.

Market vendors’ gifting tendency is not limited to Camal or even Ecuador. In her fieldwork in Peruvian markets, Seligmann observed how vendors “engaged in wheeling and dealing and stood their ground but could also be surprisingly generous, almost religiously so” (Seligmann 1989: 694). Their generosity seemed “religious” because giving is built into the vendors’ ideology of what exchange should be like.

Furthermore, most of Camal’s vendors create resilience by refusing to conform to key social aspects of their city’s changing food service economy. They show little interest in being “business-like”--that is, friendly but not *too* friendly. In contrast to food workers in a more purely commoditized exchange settings, notably the supermarket, Camal vendors completely integrate their work lives and social lives. They bring their children to work and their best friends are often their *compañeras* with neighboring stalls. One afternoon I was sitting with a vendor named Judid in her knickknack stall when an older *mestizo* couple approached. The woman had dyed red hair and very few teeth, but the ones that remained were big and white on the side of her smile. Judid and the woman exchanged a long string of pleasantries and laughed over jokes that were lost in translation. Finally, the woman asked the prices of the key chains. The couple



left, only to return a few minutes later. “We’ve decided to buy that key chain,” said the woman. Judid immediately moved up close to the man and began fastening the keychain to his waistband. After the woman paid they lingered chatting for about five minutes, until the woman shifted her eyes around and said, “We’ve got to get out of this place.” Judid nodded understandingly, put her hand on the old man's arm and said, “May God bless you.” Once the couple was gone I asked Judid, “Did you know those customers?” “No,” she said, “I’ve never seen them before.” And yet, she talked to them and touched them as if they were old friends. I witnessed scenes like this over and over again during my time at Camal.

Victor, the teacher from CENIT, went to the market several times a week specifically because it is a social space. He enjoyed walking around the market and affectionately addressed his regular vendors as his “aunts.” In anthropological terms, these are “fictive kin” titles that reference biological family to create a more intimate bond (Dodson and Zinavage 2007). Victor was drawn to the market, and especially to the indigenous vendors, because the exchange felt less alienated. Marx wrote that “the *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object...it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien” (1844). Victor meanwhile buys his from one of his “aunts” at Camal who wears an indigenous dress and gives him a “gift,” and sells him produce that she supposedly grew herself. His experience of buying and selling commodities feels neither “hostile” nor “alien.” Victor’s explanation of why he shops at Camal is strikingly similar to quotes in Gagné’s article from DC farmers’ market shoppers.

Victor appreciates Camal’s particularistic ambiance, and his false assumption that the indigenous vendors are also producers makes him like the market even more. Like many Quiteños Victor perceives Camal as “embedded in the local” and distinct from advanced

capitalist economy (Sassen 1993: 33). However, Victor's appreciation for Camal was unique among the Quiteños I met, perhaps because he has lived abroad and now appreciates Camal as uniquely Ecuadorian place. As I argued in Chapter Three, the perception that Camal is a "local" place that sells "local" food via relatively unalienated exchange actually hurts the market's reputation among most Quiteños. Considering the current popularity of local food among certain groups in the United States, including the DC farmers' market customers whom Gagné interviews, this is a telling reminder that globalization does not necessarily lead to homogenization. At the same time, the comparison between Camal and the DC farmers' market once again begs the question: are all food systems across the globe situated at different points on an inexorable capitalist progression, which starts with a gift economy, followed by hybrid markets like Camal, transitions to more alienated grocery store, and ends in the postmodern clutter we see in the United States today, comprised of Walmarts, farmers' markets, and everything in-between?

Throughout this thesis, I answer that question with an emphatic "no." Seeing Quito as "behind" Washington DC erases the complex and unequal relationships that exist between countries of the Global South and the Global North in the present moment. As this chapter has shown, the Camal market is deeply embedded in its local context *and* within a globalizing neoliberal economy. Camal is not "behind" us: we are all pinned to the same moment in history, negotiating very different "food movements."

### Conclusion

I would love to conclude with a battle cry. I wish that after two and a half years of research I could at least say, "this is what I learned, and this is how it could be applied." There is a real push at Tufts, and I would guess at similar colleges and universities, to create knowledge

that can serve the communities who participate in our research. There is a push to dismantle the imagined ivory tower that holds the “experts” high above our research “subjects.” The embrace of community-based practices of knowledge production is on the whole a good thing, I think. It leads undergraduate thesis writers like myself to ask the gnarly questions we need to be asking, the most basic one being: “why am *I* doing this research if it does not help the participants?”

I think that is a *very* good question. But it raises several other questions that are rarely articulated when frustrated students ponder academia’s utility (or perhaps futility). Did “they,” the participants, ask for your help? Could you, as an undergraduate student, do research that would actually “help” them? Let me be clear: these are not rhetorical questions, sometimes the answer is “yes,” or probably more likely, “maybe.” But what about all the peoples and places with whom you probably could not create “useful” knowledge? Should undergraduates or anyone else who is not confident in their ability to “help” cease their attempts to do research?

Furthermore, what is lost when all research must be directly applicable? In my case, I cannot imagine a research project I could have done that would have “helped” Camal’s vendors in a meaningful way. I can only imagine a research project that would have soothed my guilt over the unearned privileges that landed me in the role of “researcher” and Camal’s vendors in the role of “subjects.” The best “help” I could have given that perhaps some vendors would have actually wanted would not have been research at all. It probably would have been money to buy their kids school uniforms.

But let’s say I had tried to do a “useful” project, perhaps an educational pamphlet in Spanish or policy recommendation for Quito’s city government about why Camal is not actually a dangerous place--projects that would perhaps accomplish something my actual project has failed to do. I fear that such a “useful” project would lose the nuances I have tried so hard to

convey in every chapter. Writing the nuances was necessary to create an honest piece of work, because the nuances, or the excessiveness, are precisely what creates Camal. I see myself as a creative novice who has attempted to paint an intricate picture of a complicated place. I did this knowing that my final product might be read by few people beyond my advisors and immediate relatives. I fully anticipated that my thesis would then languish in Tufts' digital archives for decades until finally a server crashes and it disappears for good. Writing this thesis has been the best experience of my academic career, and the entire time I never had any intention of publishing anything. So when you ask, "what is the point of a thesis if it 'helps' no one," I think the question you are really asking is: what is the point of making art that perhaps no one will ever see?

There is another tension here, between the two types of "I don't know" where undergraduate thesis writers might find themselves even after months (or in my case years) of research. First, there is the throwing-your-hands-in-the-air-and-giving-up-with-a-sigh, which says, "The world is just too complicated, *we* will never really know *anything* about it." This type of "I don't know" is, in my opinion, unsatisfactory. No one gave you that research grant, or all of their time that you took up with interviews and intrusive hours of "participant-observation," so you could reach that non-conclusion. In the case of ethnography, you once again wind up romanticizing and in odd way simplifying your research participants, this time as "unknowable." As Donna Haraway (1988) reminds us, this planet and everything on it are not *only* "texts" that are endlessly open to interpretation. It is possible to actually *write about the nature of reality*, in fact that might be what saves the critical disciplines from falling into our own special hell of anti-objectivity.

But there is a second type of “I don’t know” that in my humble (and “humble” is really the point here) opinion is a perfectly acceptable conclusion. It is really an “*I don’t know yet*” that locates you as an undergraduate thesis writer. Undergraduates are not required to make definitive arguments about The Nature of The World in their theses. Because if you look closely enough, I guarantee that you will find that whoever and whatever you are studying is *really complicated*. What you are expected to do, and what you absolutely can do, is produce situated knowledge about the messy worlds that you have witnessed. Ultimately that is all anyone can do, regardless of whether they hold a PhD or a high school diploma or neither. Your argument will never be total but that doesn’t mean you cannot make one and stand behind it. True stories often lack a sweeping narrative arc, but there is still a narrative to be found in these pages.

My senior thesis has not changed the world. But one of the few things I know for sure is that my own world has been transformed by the Camal market. I learned about working with people within a different cultural context and sticky power dynamics. I realized I could work independently even when I was on a different continent than my advisors. I started thinking *through* and even against theory, rather than copy-and-pasting someone else’s ideas onto my experiences. I am thinking on a bigger and different scale than I ever had before. I have learned so much and I am still learning.

But if I must conclude for now, I would like to do so by expressing gratitude to everyone at Camal and in the United States who has helped me with this project, without necessarily receiving much in return. I feel indebted to people whom I know quite well, as well as many others whom I have not seen for several years and will likely never meet again.

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