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

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### **ABSTRACT**

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

**Keywords:** women workers, childcare, fair trade, floriculture, Ecuador

## Highlights

- Ecuadorian mothers working in fair trade flowers have concerns about childcare.
- To manage, they developed “gendered economic strategies” (Casanova 2011).
- Their strategies involved diverse childcare arrangements and visions for the future.
- These strategies maintain gendered and privatized provision of care.
- Fair trade floriculture does not sufficiently support care.

The global crisis of care (Bedford 2010; Esplen 2009; Herrera 2012) is increasingly recognized as a key and understudied facet of gender equality and human development in the Global South (Esplen 2009; Esquivel 2011; Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin 2011; Razavi and Staab 2012).

Do ethical trade initiatives, which are infusing more socially and environmentally responsible practices into global production, have potential for alleviating this crisis? While critics of ethical trade question whether the market can effectively provide workers’ social welfare and development more broadly (Dolan 2005; Rice 2009; Riisgaard 2007) and highlight its exclusion of informal and reproductive workers, the majority of whom are women (Barrientos 2010; Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003), there has been little attention to care in the context of ethical trade. How do women who *are* protected by ethical trade policies fair in the realm of care?

Through a case study of Nevado Roses, a fair trade certified farm in Ecuador, this article examines ethical trade’s potential for supporting women workers’ gendered responsibilities to care, concluding that it leaves much to be desired. Based on interviews with thirty-eight women workers with children, I find that mothers create individual private “gendered economic strategies” (Casanova 2011, 4) to manage childcare and work conditions at Nevado Roses. These

strategies reflect material conditions, gender norms, and future aspirations, and demonstrate the inadequacies of privatized care arrangements occurring alongside fair trade production. At Nevado Roses, ethical production practices under fair trade, though they provide many benefits that advance social welfare and gender equality in the workplace, also perpetuate unjust labor conditions for women by failing to sufficiently support or challenge their gendered roles as primary caregivers. A “key input into the process of economic, social and human development” (Razavi and Staab 2012, 21), care must garner more attention and support if trade is to be sustainable or ethical.

### **CARE AND ETHICAL TRADE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

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

One frame of analysis for this group, typically grounded in formal employment contexts of the Global North, is mothering. Contemporary studies find that employed mothers’ realities and views on mothering challenge the time intensive and emotionally engrossing ideal of

“intensive mothering” (Hays 1996). Single mothers who must work (Christopher 2012) and women of color who draw on larger community for raising children (Collins 2000) feel particularly less accountable to intensive mothering. More women view employment as part of mothering (Garey 1999), long evident in women of color’s experiences (Collins 2000). Current research, in fact, shows that mothers—in response to material, temporal, and spatial constraints—rely on “extensive” or delegatory mothering (Christopher 2012) and “transnational mothering” (Herrera 2010) that enable them to orchestrate caring arrangements without direct oversight.

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

Women workers in the Global South have many ways of organizing care and employment. Often, they rely on other underpaid and under resourced women (Casanova 2011) inside (Dreby 2010; Herrera 2012) and outside (Talcott 2004) the family. In some cases, mothers leave children at home alone (Korovkin 2003; Moser 1993; Vandegrift 2008). These strategies

and the “success” of organizing, as well as job satisfaction, depend on children’s age (Casanova 2011). The presence of daughters in the household is also an important factor. Though they can lessen mothers’ care burdens, this solution negatively affects daughters’ educational opportunities and perpetuates gender inequality (Herrera 2012; Moser 1993; Pitkin and Bedoya 1997).

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

Gender and development policy encourages this privatized, individual care. The World Bank’s lauding of a thirty-minute increase in men’s housework<sup>2</sup> in the Ecuadorian flower industry (Newman 2002) is one example (Bedford 2009). Promoting increased care by poor men as a route to gender equality encourages not only household provision of care; it assumes heterosexual nuclear family arrangements (Bedford 2009), an assumption all too common in

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<sup>1</sup> Webber and Williams (2008) similarly emphasize how U.S. women assuming individual responsibility for their “choices,” in this case, to work part time, obscures structural inequality.

development theory and practice (Lind and Share 2003). This privatized heteronormative policy model, also evident in United Nations policy on women and care (Bedford 2010), highlights the World Bank's inattention to local contexts and lived realities of women workers, many of whom, in the case of Ecuador, live alone or in extended family arrangements (Bedford 2009; Deere 2005).

This inattention to women's lived experience that characterizes development policy (Bhavnani and Bywater 2009) is also evident in ethical trade models of development (Rice 2009), which make private businesses the providers of economic growth, social welfare, and labor rights (Dolan 2005). Much of the small<sup>3</sup> strand of ethical trade research that examines gender does so from a policy level, rather than from an individual or lived experience level of women workers (See Dolan and Sutherland 2002 for an exception). It highlights that informal and reproductive work—areas of labor where women are most concentrated and where gender-sensitive standards could most support women workers—remain outside the coverage of labor legislation (Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003). This structure therefore excludes most women from the benefits of ethical standards (Barrientos 2010; Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003; Tallontire et al. 2005). When ethical standards do reach women, the retailer driven (Riisgaard 2007) and specialist regulated (Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007) organization of ethical trade means standards have more influence on “visible” issues (health and safety) than “nonvisible” (discrimination and freedom of association) (Barrientos 2010;

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<sup>2</sup> Newman's (2002) data differentiates between recreation, personal care, and farm, paid, community, and housework. I assume that care of dependents in the home falls under housework.

<sup>3</sup> Rice (2009, 42) underlines the absence of gender in recent literature on fair trade. For example, only one chapter of three recent volumes on fair trade (Raynolds, Murray and Wilkinson 2007; Lyon and Moberg 2010; MacDonald and Marshall 2010) focuses on women. None have chapters on gender.

Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2011; Wright and Madrid 2005) or gender specific issues such as women's representation on worker's committees and childcare (Barrientos 2010).

Fair trade does not transcend a focus on productive labor, but does address some of the weak social and gender policies in other ethical initiatives.<sup>4</sup> Requiring annual and surprise third party audits, fair trade guarantees workers' rights to unionize and, where unions are absent, establishes workers' committees. It mandates equal pay, proportional representation on workers' and fair trade committees, freedom from discrimination based on pregnancy, maternity leave, and nursing, three weeks<sup>5</sup> of paid leave, and community projects paid for by the fair trade committee managed fair trade premium (equal to 10 percent of fair trade sales).<sup>6</sup> Fair trade certification of Ecuadorian flower farms ensures social and environmental labor conditions exceed legal and industry norms, and contributes to worker empowerment through fair trade workers' committees (Raynolds 2012). Fair trade, then, may be improving women's policy issues under ethical trade, but because of the focus in previous research on regulatory structures, there is virtually no knowledge of how mothers negotiate childcare in any ethical trade setting.

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

## **ECUADOR**

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.standardsmap.org/> to compare standards.

<sup>5</sup> Ecuadorian national policy requires only twelve days (World Bank 2014b).

<sup>6</sup> Nevado Roses workers' 2011 fair trade premium totaled USD 67,447.



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

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

The province where I conducted research, Cotopaxi, has the third lowest percentage of children primarily cared for by mothers—still at 70.2 percent (INEC 2006). An agricultural region, Cotopaxi has slightly higher rates of female labor force participation than the national average, but also high rates of underemployment (78.59 percent) (INEC 2012). Self-employment is the most common type of employment (35.4 percent for women) and over 68 percent of employed people do not contribute to any insurance or social security program (INEC 2010).

## METHODS

This article is based on qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations at Nevado Roses, a fair trade certified rose farm in the sierra county of Salcedo (population 58,216 in 2010), province of Cotopaxi, Ecuador. In value, Ecuador is the world's third largest producer of cut flowers and second largest producer of roses, boasting one of the oldest concentrations of fair trade floriculture (Raynolds 2012). In 2008, floriculture directly employed 115,969 Ecuadorians (60 percent women); in 2011, fair trade plantations employed 1,981 Ecuadorians (Raynolds 2012).

Nevado Roses was one of the first farms to become fair trade certified in 2002. An “exemplary” grower (Ziegler 2010), with multiple ethical certifications, Nevado Roses, as an employment opportunity, is an anomaly in the region. When I conducted research in June and July 2012, it had an onsite medical clinic linked the national health system, a free day care for children under five, accommodating approximately thirty children per day, a micro loans program, and strict environmental and chemical safety regulations. Most employees utilized the employer-provided free transportation to and from work and all enjoyed free lunches and uniforms. The farm paid the legal minimum wage and overtime, on time, which was uncommon in jobs that interviewees had held previously. Workers had 12 weeks of maternity leave, 21 days of paid vacation per year, and could request leave to attend their children's school activities. Benefits developed by workers using the fair trade premium included access to a dentist, a scholarship program for employee children, organic gardening programs, and community activities such as recycling fairs for local schools. The farm's 442 workers, 56 percent of whom were women, produced about 25 million roses per year, making it one of the country's largest producers.

Over four weeks in 2012, I conducted in-depth interviews with 44 workers, three administrators, and the company president, as well as two focus groups with the workers<sup>7</sup> and fair trade committees. While conducting interviews, I spent 120 hours at the farm, engaged in ethnographic observation of workers' daily routines and participation in special events organized by the fair trade committees. This two-pronged approach allowed me to witness the benefits and challenges workers identified in their work, to learn the details of fair trade rose production, and to develop rapport with interviewees.

I limit my analysis to mothers who grew, harvested, monitored, and packaged roses—those on the “shop floor”—for a sample of 38. I focus on women because they are primarily responsible for care in Ecuador. This sample included at least four women from each of seven supervisor groups. Within each group, I approached women of different ages and asked if I could interview them while they worked, typically spread out among tall rows of roses in vast greenhouses. This strategy minimally disrupted workers' routines and completion of daily tasks, ensuring that they went home on time and were paid as we talked. Marriage rates, age, and education of interviewees were nearly equal to, or slightly higher than, provincial indicators (INEC 2010). See Table 1. More than half of the interviewees were sole providers and over one third lived with extended family. Separated and divorced interviewees received little, if any, support from children's fathers. Childcare strategies were diverse and used in combination. See Table 2. Rates of day care use were 10 percent higher than the provincial average.

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<sup>7</sup> Without a union, as is typical in Ecuador (see Reynolds 2012), workers relied on the fair trade

Table 1. Interviewee Characteristics

	Median	Range	Frequency % (N)
Age	34	20-49	
Number of Children	2	1-5	
Age of Children	14	2-29	
Years of Education	8	0-13	
Years at Nevado	7	.17-14	
Married			47% (18)
Separated or Divorced			18% (7)
Sole Provider			53% (20)
Live With Extended Family			37% (14)

Table 2. Childcare Arrangements

Care Provider	Frequency <sup>A</sup> % (N)
Nevado Nursery	32% (12)
Home Alone	21% (8)
Worker's Mother	24% (9)
Other Family Member	16% (6)
Worker's Daughter	8% (3)
Other Nursery	8% (3)

<sup>A</sup> All arrangements were used in combination.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish as “conversations with a purpose” (Burgess 1984) and ranged from 12 to 40 minutes, with an average of 22 minutes. I asked women to tell me about work: their typical day, what it was like to work on the farm, how it differed from other

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mandated workers’ committee to defend workers and negotiate with management.

work experiences they had had, life: how it was to manage work and family, and the future: their hopes, plans, and ideas. Upon returning to the U.S., recorded interviews were transcribed and coded using qualitative software. Interviewee names are pseudonyms and translations from Spanish are mine. Nevado Roses is not a pseudonym.

## **FINDINGS**

In the analysis, I first outline conditions and beliefs that informed women's gendered economic strategies. I then examine these strategies and the tensions they reveal between material conditions necessitating full time employment, and cultural and social norms about care. I conclude with women's visions for a more gender equitable and care centered future.

### **Conditions and Beliefs Informing Gendered Economic Strategies**

While Nevado Roses provided benefits that the majority of women workers in the Global South lack, the job made it nearly impossible for women to spend time with their children. Alameda, 35, explained how, ironically, the flowers that take women away from their children are like children; they require the same care: "The plant that you sow is like raising a kid, if you bring it up well, it blooms nicely, if you don't cultivate it well, the flowers wither, they don't grow." Children and flowers need care to prosper, but the flower industry and capitalism prioritize flowers. Flowers require around the clock care and especially long hours during peak periods like Valentine's Day. This grueling work schedule made 23-year-old Alexandra hope her son would get an education and have a different type of job: "I want him [my son] to study, what I couldn't have I want to give to him, so he is someone in life because yes, it is hard to work here." Workers had to be on the farm six days a week, beginning at 6:30 A.M. and ending around 3:30 P.M. during the week and 1:00 P.M. on one weekend work day. An additional hour of commuting to and from the plantation and changing into work clothes meant women were away

from home for about 11 hours per day, from 5:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. They left home before school began (7:30 A.M. for primary school and 7:00 A.M. for high school), returned hours after school let out (12:30 P.M. for primary school and 1:00 P.M. for high school), and struggled to find care for their children older than five years old, the cut off for Nevado Roses' nursery, during this time.

Wages compounded this predicament. All workers earned the national minimum monthly wage of USD 292, but this barely covered subsistence needs. "Our salary is lacking . . . It doesn't even get to USD 300, we have everything we are supposed to have by law, but even though we have everything, economically we are lacking, we need something more . . . I don't have anything to save" (Deb). Deb, a 40-year-old widowed mother of two, recognized she had "everything" she should have by law, but thought a good salary ought to be double what she received. Insufficient income was a barrier to making ends meet and paying childcare providers. It also encouraged overtime (limited to 12 hours per week) as a way to increase earnings, exacerbating the problem of long working hours.

Though women provided basic material support for their children, low wages, long hours, and lack of employer-provided day care for school-age children inhibited their ability to provide as much care as they wanted to. While offering expanded care arrangements, like expanded daycare, would have helped women in their childcare dilemma, and many women were thankful for the daycare they did have access to at Nevado, there was an overwhelming sense that they just wanted to have more time with their children. "When we leave [work] at night, there isn't time to do anything in the house and we can't spend much time with our kids, we only go to bed, especially during the busy season," said 23-year-old Alexandra.

Though they recognized the inadequacy of their pay and the monopolization of their time by flowers, some workers employed the belief that they, individually, could accomplish everything if they were organized, echoing findings in earlier research (Casanova 2011; Pitkin and Bedoya 1997). Louisa, a 47-year-old single mother of four, explained how she balanced home and work with organizing:

I am organizing now, since I have to enter to do my labor, I have to fulfill my work schedule, then in the house I organize and I do what I am able to [there]. The majority of the time I am here [at the farm], I only rest one Saturday or one Sunday. This day I take advantage by doing as many things as I can in the house, also when I get home early [during the week]. This is my case, but I don't know about the rest because one has to organize to be able to do anything, if you don't organize you can't do anything.

The unequal burden that women like Louisa experienced was reasoned away by seventeen interviewees as a matter of individual organization, or as a necessary personal sacrifice or duty: “You have to hold your own working here and also in the house. I hold my own because I have to. If I don't, who is going to do it for me?” (Kim, age 38, married mother of a six-year-old). Focusing on the individual, rather than the norms and policy that shoulders women with the provision of care and, increasingly, financial stability (and the work of managing both), inhibits analysis of the structural barriers these mothers face.

It also lets male family members off the hook and masks how the gendered responsibility to care burdens other women in the household, particularly daughters, a reoccurring theme in the literature. Ilene, 37, separated from her husband, and mother to a nine-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter, illustrated this reality. When I asked her if it was difficult to work both in the home and on the farm, she responded, “No, because thank god I have the help of my daughter. She

helps me a lot because sometimes you do come home tired. Then she'll say, 'Mami, just go rest, I am going to make dinner.' So she helps me a lot."

As confirmed by other scholars, children's age also made a difference for the level of difficulty involved in organizing. Katrina, 45 and a single mother of a 14, 15, and 16-year-old, explained:

Well, at first [managing work at the farm and in the house] was difficult because my kids were little, but now no, now they are all young adults. Now, what I do see is how my female co-workers that have small children despair about attending to them and everything else. I say, 'I have passed through all of this already; now that I feel less stressed [about childcare], I could work eighteen hours per day if needed ... I don't have the responsibilities of small children, mine are big, they provide for themselves.

Ilene's "thank god I have my daughter" and Katrina's recognition of the "despair" of her coworkers pointed to challenges managed by women who had young children who could not help out in the home, make their mothers dinner, or provide for themselves.

Women's views that they were responsible for doing what was best for their children further informed their organizing strategies, and how they felt about them. Interviewees typically described their decision to work at Nevado Roses as a something they did, or even as a sacrifice, *for* their children, often to pay for their education. "[Because of my kids] I have to work, I have to get them ahead because when I was young I didn't even finish school" (Alameda, single mother of two school age children who stayed home alone). Daisy, 40 who was married with two children ages 17 and nine, and who had quit working at Nevado when her children were young, explained, "You have to work, to fight to be able to get ahead for your children, for their wellbeing . . . for them you have to sacrifice, to work hard." While women chose to work at



Nevado Roses for their children, they simultaneously identified childcare arrangements as the main problem with their work and expressed desires to quit, either to care for children full time, have a flexible job closer to home, or just to spend more time with their children. These concerns and desires illustrate how women felt they were not doing what was best for their children in terms of care, even if they were doing was best educationally and financially. For example, all workers sacrificed what Daisy saw as a taken-for-granted aspect of mothering: “Always, *[as] you know*, the mother should send the child to school” (my emphasis). Women were concerned about not fulfilling care expectations when they left children alone and when they left children with others.

### **Gendered Economic Strategies**

#### *Leaving Children Home Alone*

The eight women who left children home alone discussed this reality in diverse ways. While some said that their children “stay home all alone” (Chloe, 24, married mother of a five-year-old) or are on their own: “[my husband] and I come home late, we have our son on his own” (Rosa, 24, mother of a five-year-old), Dorothy, a 40-year-old single mother of five (the youngest was 10), talked about her situation in terms of abandonment:

For me it isn't complete abandonment because it isn't that I leave them out in the street (*botado*), but it is abandonment for the hours while I am at work . . . In my case, I make them coffee, I help them get up and put on their uniforms, but during the lunch hour I am not present. For now, I have my mom, who helps me, but when she is gone, then it will be abandonment.

No matter how much she did to prepare her children for the day, Dorothy just wasn't around for many hours. Her job required her to be at the farm through lunch, a time when many

Ecuadorians return home for a family meal. In line with the view that mothers should be primary caregivers, Dorothy characterized her absence from the home as a form of abandonment, despite the fact that her mother assisted with care. Her use of “abandonment” reflects the tensions between employment and gendered responsibilities to care that Nevado Roses workers constantly negotiated.

As in Dorothy’s case, absent fathers, a shared experience for 21 interviewees, shaped gendered economic strategies. Mel, 25, had left her family and native region, the Amazon, or *Oriente*, after conflicts with her husband. When I asked who took care of her eight-year-old after he returned from school, she replied:

No one, he comes home by himself and this year, my other little one [who will start school] will have to stay home alone too because I am father and mother for them, I alone take care of them . . . Here, when they have school sessions I have to ask for leave so I can go because there isn’t anyone else, I don’t have family here, I am alone.

Two other women shouldered all responsibility for the home and children, along with working in flowers, because their partners worked in the petroleum rich *Oriente*, whose oil production provided attractive jobs for men. 40-year-old Samantha explained, “It’s difficult to work here and in the home. My husband works in the *Oriente*, I live alone with my youngest daughter [age 15] and I work to pay the rent, it is a sacrifice.” Ecuadorian men, who are generally relieved of caretaking, had access to far away more lucrative jobs than floriculture. These jobs helped the household financially, but reinforced gendered divisions of labor inside and outside the home.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Busse’s research in Peru also highlights how men’s migration reinforces gendered divisions of labor (Bastia and Busse 2011).

Michaela, 36 and separated from her partner, spoke about leaving her nine-year-old son at home alone, not in terms of abandonment, but by describing her adaptive strategy to get him to school on time. Michaela's strategy was to trust in the independence of her child:

[When my son was younger], I would leave him changed, fed and ready to go and since he didn't know how to tell time, I would tell him to tell time by the television because they, a program of some artists, would [end at a certain time] and when they would end it would be 6:45 A.M. and I would say "son, when they say there [in the program] 'bye bye', you should go." . . . From there, he would go out and be waiting for the bus when it arrived to take him to school.

Michaela choose to work at Nevado and create this childcare strategy because of the benefits of her job. In contrast to other jobs she had had, she explained, "This is a good job, the benefits they give are everything we need." One benefit she emphasized was leave during the workday for school activities:

I don't have anyone that can go [to the school for me], but here they give me permission, one, two hours, even three. This is what helps me, because I need these hours in order to go [to the school]. In contrast, in other jobs, I don't think that they give the permissions like here.

While Michaela left her son at home alone because of her job, and sometimes thought she would quit to work at home and care for him, she stayed because the job allowed her to be there in other ways. It supported her involvement in school activities, allowing her to be present in that part of her son's life. She doubted she could find this benefit in another job, highlighting the lack of good job opportunities available to women. Michaela's compromise between care and Nevado Roses benefits exemplifies interviewees' ambivalence over both.

### *Leaving Children with Others*

Four interviewees chose not to use the Nevado Roses nursery even though their children were young enough to attend:

I brought [my son] to the nursery for a while. But he didn't like it because we had to get up at the crack of dawn . . . He would protest, [saying] burrrrrr (*achaychay*) and that he didn't want to walk [to the bus stop], so I would have to carry him all the way. For this reason, I didn't bring him, he stayed with my sister. (Ilene)

Because of the early entrance hours and distance to employer-provided daycare—already limited because it didn't provide care for older children after school—Ilene and others relied on combinations of care providers such as community nurseries and family members. Leaving children with others could create a different problem. Women didn't feel guilty for leaving their children, but worried their children would become more attached to their caregivers than to their parents.<sup>9</sup>

Alexandra, whose three-year-old son attended a community daycare and stayed with his grandparents until Alexandra and her husband returned from work, wanted to leave to be with her son more because “he knows his grandmother better [than me].” In contrast, Chloe was concerned that her daughter was closer to Chloe's husband than to Chloe. In the past, only Chloe's husband worked at Nevado Roses, so they sent their daughter with him to the Nevado Roses nursery. Chloe explained how she and her husband saw this as a problem:

My daughter was getting closer to him and hardly at all to me, like she didn't love me, so he [my husband] told me to quit and to come here [Nevado Roses]. So I had to come here and had to leave [my] other job for my daughter, more than anything.

Chloe and her husband worked to fulfill cultural expectations that children be raised by or attached to their mothers as caregivers. They both made sacrifices—she left a job she enjoyed, and he gave up time with his daughter—to ensure Chloe, as a mother, was closest to their daughter. Though Chloe was not the person who spent the most time with her daughter, she did take charge of her daughter’s days and welfare, engaging in what Christopher (2012) terms “extensive mothering.” Her story is not a critique of Nevado’s childcare, but an illustration of cultural expectations about gendered caregiving and lack of time with children (for men and women) that long work hours create. Chloe and her husband’s concern about who took the child to daycare may have been less acute had they had more time with their daughter.

#### *Working for a Different Future*

The majority of interviewees did not challenge the privatization of care. They described Nevado Roses as an exceptionally good job in a context of few, precarious, and exploitative employment opportunities. They recommended that there be more work opportunities like it and more employer provided daycare. About one-third of interviewees, however, looked beyond the benefits of Nevado Roses and discussed solutions to the conflict between the roles of provider and caregiver. The most common solution was leaving Nevado Roses to work from home, an individual response to the structural barriers of their lives. Another vision moved toward a structural critique of gendered privatized care. These visions, because they were part of women’s ambivalence about their jobs and because they were employed as a way to justify current predicaments and struggles with care, are facets of gendered economic strategies.

Thirty-year-old Candis, mother of a 12 and four-year-old, fell into the group who wanted to leave Nevado Roses to spend more time with their children. Most of these women had detailed

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<sup>9</sup> Dreby (2010) provides an in-depth discussion of children’s attachment to caregivers in her

plans for small businesses that they could do from home. Candis, however, stressed that despite her desire to lessen the conflict between care and employment, financial reality limited her options. It was impossible to have what she wanted—time with her children—because she had to work to support them.

Researcher: What do you want for your kids?

Candis: That they study and be something in life. Working here, yes, we have gotten ahead. [But] I want to leave to spend more time in the house because sometimes my son doesn't even eat lunch because I am not in the house and so I want to leave, but I still don't have enough to stay at home, so then for sure you have to work.

Candis felt tension between her roles, and revealed the negative effects that lack of care can have on children. Ilene also mentioned these consequences—her at-home-alone children got sick after eating bad fruit. While Candis was unable to leave Nevado Roses because the household needed her income at the time of the interview, it was possible she would eventually have the means to do so.

Eleven women planned to work for just a couple more years and were confident they would have enough savings to leave and start something else. One element of their gendered economic strategies was to use their earnings instrumentally to save for small businesses that, though they would likely be more precarious than employment at Nevado Roses, would give them more flexibility for care. For example, thirty-one-year-old Jackie, mother of a five-year-old, was going to stay at Nevado Roses for one more year and then buy a sewing machine to set up her own shop at home.

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study of Mexican migrant families.

Two workers theorized more broadly about a situation where they could work in flowers *and* experience less stress about their children. They liked their work and getting out of the house, but thought work should be less physically demanding (a sentiment expressed by five interviewees) and fewer hours. Jessica, 28, suggested “that there be less work” and highlighted men’s lack of contribution to care (both relational and indirect), explaining: “It’s that, in this life [we] have to work more than men, we work here and work at home . . . They work, provided that the dinner is ready, they arrive, eat, and sleep. We have to look after our kids, the clothes, come here [to Nevado Roses]; imagine, it’s hard.”

Another cultivator, Rosa, 24, enjoyed work outside the home and highlighted how her wages enabled her family to accumulate savings, but her son was starting school and she couldn’t find anyone to care for him after school. With no one to care for her son, Rosa felt she should stay at home: “Overall in life, yes I have liked working and not being stuck in the house. But with the necessity of providing care for my son, I would like to stay at home.” She felt compelled to fulfill the ideal of being a primary caregiver even though she liked “not being stuck in the house.”

Rosa thought the best solution to women’s dilemma would be shorter working hours. Her ideas were the most elaborate discussion I heard of structural change to support gender equality and care:

[We should] be able to have jobs that are a little lighter, or more—how should I explain it to you? —*part time, so we could dedicate ourselves to both things. It would be to work and a little to the kids.* This [is what I want], that [the government] give[s] us some work like this. (emphasis mine)

Rosa's vision outlines a society that recognizes the value of care by redesigning employment to make space to engage in care, a structure that could apply to and benefit women and men. Her vision is a fair shift, with more balance between time with family and time at work, something that requires a radical transformation of cultural and social values and material conditions. It requires not only better access to childcare, but also the right for parents to spend time caring for their children.

Both Candis and Rosa underlined the contradictions between employment and care that fair trade production perpetuates. Candis worked at Nevado Roses to pay the bills, even though she wanted to be at home. Rosa worked to build savings and preferred employment outside the home, but thought she should stay at home. By suggesting women work part-time and implying that such a job should not be considered part-time by today's standards—"how should I explain it to you?" —, but a quality job where one could earn enough money to support a family, Rosa highlighted the gendered character of fair trade jobs. They are structured within a framework focused only on productive labor and what is ethical within this sphere, designed for workers without primary responsibility for care.

Respondents' stories reveal tensions between women's expected roles, what they enjoyed, what their economic situation permitted, and what they envisioned as a better situation or society. They valued their job's benefits and earning a stable wage, but recognized that their employment did not accommodate their culturally presumed responsibilities as mothers, or their desire to spend time with their children. Though policy provided a day care center, in practice, women had to cobble together childcare arrangements on their own and envision better futures to justify or get through undesirable situations. The privatized individual gendered economic strategies



women developed, whether leaving children home alone, with others, or planning for a better future, enabled “ethical” rose production to continue to ignore care.

## CONCLUSION

This article explores a previously little discussed issue: that of ethical trade’s effect on women’s caring labor. It demonstrates how even ethical trade initiatives can perpetuate burdens on women to craft private childcare strategies. Inadequate provision of childcare, long hours, and low pay made women’s primary care of children, still expected by social and cultural norms and aspired to by interviewees, nearly impossible. The gendered economic strategies that women orchestrated, according to the shared constraints of their chosen employment and varied constraints of family support, reproduced private and gendered provision of care. They demonstrate that “ethical” production at Nevado Roses operates on the structural and cultural assumption that women can, and will, supply endless quantities of caring labor and/or take responsibility for lack of care alongside their full-time employment. Such insights illustrate how gendered processes can remain invisible even in ethically conscientious efforts to address gender inequalities in the workplace.

My research considers interviewees experience in the context of concepts developed to understand working mothers’ ways of managing care in other regions. In many ways, “mothering” concepts developed in the Global North, with their attention to how employed women navigate cultural norms about care, facilitate understanding of the ways interviewees managed work and care in fair trade flower production in Ecuador. Women workers at Nevado Roses performed multiple types of mothering. They wanted to be the ones to take their children to school or day care, to do “extensive mothering” (Christopher 2012). As poor and single mothers, many had no choice but to “weave” (Garey 1999) work and family together. Though their practices of relying

on kin are similar to those of women of color in the United States (see Collins 2000), the tensions they expressed about these arrangements attest to the cultural contradiction of motherhood that simultaneous aspiration to “intensive mothering” (Hays 1996) and the “ideal worker” (Williams 2000) creates. Like Hattery’s (2001) “pragmatist” mothers, who had both of these aspirations, interviewees changed their childcare arrangements over time depending on choices and opportunities for employment and childcare; they experienced high levels of guilt and ambivalence over their inability to fulfill both commitments.

Future research could determine the utility of these concepts for other groups of women in the Global South who are increasingly managing wage labor and care in new formal employment contexts like fair trade production. Are women entering “ethical jobs” continuing to adhere to impossible ideals, or are they developing beliefs and practices that challenge the injustices they face, that push to create truly fair and ethical production? With the exception of interviewees who envisioned better futures, I argue that most workers have practices that resonate with studies of employed mothers elsewhere and that the concept of gendered economic strategies, through explicit attention to material conditions, facilitates understanding of their experiences. Through this framework, I show that interviewees’ cobbled together care strategies are similarly privatized as care in other settings and that the distinct material conditions and cultural norms of their lives both require change to support care.

Material reality in Ecuador is one where the ability of economic and state systems to provide social reproduction and mobility are in question (Herrera 2012). Poor Ecuadorians lack resources to address the crisis of care by hiring help, as women with economic resources do in the Global North (Herrera 2012) and South (Esquivel 2011). Even if hiring help were possible, such a solution, like policies focused on changing cultural norms within the home to increase

men's care, will not address, and in fact exacerbates, worker exploitation and care's privatization (Bedford 2009). Addressing gender inequality in care requires structural change (see Esquivel 2011).

Institutional change to recognize and value children and care as public goods, to socialize care, is one way to begin (Folbre 1994, 2008). This approach could be effective for degendering and defamilializing social welfare in Ecuador, as advocated by Franzoni (2008). But fair care also requires new conceptualizations of care time and space, alongside work and personal time and space (Williams 2001, 488), and legitimation of “the values people hold in family life, in particular around the norm of parental care—the sense that children should be cared for (to a certain, undefined, extent) by their parents” (Williams 2000, 4-5). Material supports for transformation of norms about the gendered nature of care and its value are necessary too—jobs like those envisioned by some of my respondents, with good wages, equitable time at work and at home, scheduling that accommodates care, for men and women, and expanded childcare options. In the Global South, creating policies that align with these ideas, and create these jobs, requires more research on state social welfare structures and capacities (see Franzoni 2008), incorporation of care in development policy (see Esplen 2009; Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin 2011; Razavi and Staab 2012), and inclusion of local women's experiences of gender inequality and ideas for change (see Bhavnani and Bywater 2009; Tallontire et al 2005).

Finally, though this study highlights gendered inequalities within ethical trade and questions the sustainability of market mechanisms as drivers of development (see Dolan 2005), it affirms the idea that ethical trade, alongside state efforts, could be employed to speed processes of structural change that support care. The proliferation of ethical trade initiatives demonstrates that many different actors are interested in enhancing labor conditions and social standards, in

production, distribution, and consumption. Including support for care in conceptualizations of “ethical” production, and more explicitly as a requirement for certification, could contribute to positive outcomes for workers and advance forms of economic production that value and support care.

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