

Matthew J. Zinsli

Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students
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I am extremely grateful to the Mellon Foundation for the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in Ecuador with the Area and International Studies Fellowship. The fellowship allowed me to spend a month in the country speaking to government ministries, producer associations, non-profit foundations, and business owners. This fieldwork helped me to refine the questions, theories, and sites I hope to explore in greater depth through my dissertation research. Below I highlight some of the most meaningful interactions and how each aided me in advancing my research agenda.

In Quito, I was able to conduct several interviews with representatives of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. These interviews focused on the Ecuadorian government's recent initiatives to establish denominations of origin (DO) for several agricultural and handicraft products. Informants highlighted the role of knowledge sharing between the French government and Ecuadorian ministries, including technical advice to define and establish DO, *terroir* expertise to demonstrate the unique geographic qualities of Ecuador's DO products, and continuing assistance in marketing and distribution. Informants provided information and documentation concerning three established DO – *café de Galápagos*, *cacao de arriba*, and the *sombrero fino de paja toquilla*. These informants also provided further contact information with producer associations involved in DO supply chains, and agreed to additional, in-depth interviews at a future date.

Using contacts provided by these informants, I was able to visit two sites where DO are established in Ecuador. At the first site, in the Napo region of the Amazon, I spoke with representatives of a cacao producer association. This association is not currently certified to produce DO cacao but has been in communication with government ministries about establishing a DO. Additionally, I spoke with the president a producer association involved in the production of *sacha inchik*, a native rainforest vine that produces an oil-rich nut. These interviews provided information about regional development initiatives.

At a second site, I was able to conduct interviews with three individuals involved in the supply chain for the *sombrero fino de paja toquilla*, also known as the Panama hat. The identification of this hat is a misnomer, as it actually comes from the region around Montecristi, Ecuador. In establishing a DO for the hat, Ecuador's government is simultaneously attempting to reclaim the identity of the hat for itself and its citizens, as well as exploring how the logic of DO can be extended to products other than food or beverages. Interviews with these informants provided information about the process of establishing the DO, the supply chain and production practices of hat-making, and the economic costs and benefits of becoming certified to sell under the DO.

I conducted additional exploratory research with actors involved in other agricultural development projects in Ecuador. I conducted field site visits and spoke with the staff of a non-profit foundation working with women's groups around Cayambe to expand production and create a supply chain for an agave-based liquor, *chahuarmishki*. I also conducted interviews with a non-profit foundation and coffee-grower associations involved in reforestation efforts in the coastal province of Manabí. Finally, I spoke with three members of a woman's group that produces artisanal handicrafts to sell in Otavalo.

Ultimately, this fieldwork allowed me to confirm the feasibility of my dissertation research project, which will center around the development of denominations of origin in Ecuador. I was able to expand my network of contacts, conduct initial interviews and gather documentation, and determine the sites where I will establish my case studies. I am indeed thankful for the opportunity afforded by the Mellon Foundation to conduct this preliminary research.