

Food Sovereignty, Agro-Extractive Resilience, and Dietary Transformations during the Second and Third Food Regimes in Ecuador (1964-2007)

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Recent decades of substantial change in food production, transformation, and consumption have been systematized into the food regimes theory (FRT). Despite extensive research into global dynamics and the role of states in these activities, a deficit remains regarding to our understanding of long-term transformations in Latin American countries such as Ecuador and the interactive dynamics of FRT, state actions, elements of food sovereignty and dietary evolution. To diminish the gap, this study analyses the evolution of food relations in Ecuador during the second and third food regimes, which spanned from 1964 to 2007. The Ecuadorian agrarian model features very important export crops along with a relevant amount of food production for domestic markets. This article explores the complex evolution of this model and highlights the importance of considering the medium-term effects of dietary changes.

Soberanía alimentaria, resiliencia agroextractiva y transformaciones dietéticas durante el segundo y tercer régimen alimentario en Ecuador (1964-2007)

PALABRAS CLAVE: regímenes alimentarios, agroextractivismo, transformaciones alimentarias, América Latina.

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***E**n las últimas décadas se han producido cambios sustanciales en la producción, la transformación y el consumo de alimentos que han sido sistematizados por la teoría de los regímenes alimentarios (TRA). Sin embargo, a pesar de las numerosas investigaciones sobre la dinámica global y el papel del Estado, sigue habiendo un déficit de comprensión de las transformaciones a largo plazo en países latinoamericanos como Ecuador, especialmente en lo que respecta a la interacción entre la TRA, las acciones del Estado y los elementos de la soberanía alimentaria y la evolución de la dieta. Este estudio aborda esta laguna analizando la evolución de las relaciones alimentarias en Ecuador durante el segundo y tercer régimen alimentario, que, teniendo en cuenta las particularidades del caso ecuatoriano, abarcan desde 1964 hasta 2007. Ecuador tiene un modelo agrario en el que conviven cultivos de exportación muy importantes y una parte relevante de la producción alimentaria destinada a los mercados internos. Este artículo explora la compleja evolución de este modelo. Además, el estudio destaca la importancia de considerar los efectos a medio plazo de los cambios en la dieta.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Food production, transformation, distribution, and consumption have undergone dramatic transformations in recent years which have been collected, systematized and explained by food regimes theory (FRT) (Friedmann, 1993; Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2009a). Inside FRT, there is a very broad genealogy. Thus, different approaches have progressively incorporated geopolitical, regulatory, ecological and agronomic aspects (McMichael, 2009a; Moore, 2017; Pechlaner & Otero, 2010; Winders, 2009a). This research uses one of the initial and more restrictive definitions of food regime, which understands it as “rule-governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale” (Friedmann, 1993: 30–31).

Different studies have analyzed both global dynamics and the role of different states (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2009b; Winders, 2009b, 2009a). Globally speaking, FRT insists on the existence of asymmetrical power relations among countries (imperialism, dependence, etc.) distinguishing between central and peripheral economies and defending that different states have very different capacities to shape global and domestic patterns of food production, transformation, distribution and consumption (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2009a; Tilzey, 2018b, 2019b). Following this general framework, the possibilities and effects of State actions have been frequently analyzed not only in developed countries (Winders, 2009a) but also in emerging economies (Escher, 2021; Pechlaner & Otero, 2010). There are studies that analyze the role played in aggregate terms by Latin America in the Second Food Regime (SFR) and the Third Food Regime (TFR) (Otero, 2012; Tilzey, 2018a). Also, global analyzes sometimes refer to the role of Latin America in the different food regimes (Magnan, 2012; McMichael, 2009b, 2009a; Tilzey, 2019a). Some academic literature applies FRT to the analysis of food production, consumption and governance in some Latin American countries (Chohan, 2024; Niederle, 2018). Even not taking FRT as a theoretical framework, wide literature has analyzed changes in food relations in Brazil (Søndergaard, 2023), Argentina (Lapegna, 2017), Venezuela (Purcell, 2017), Bolivia (Webber, 2017), Uruguay (Piñeiro & Cardeillac, 2017), or Nicaragua (Martí i Puig & Baumeister, 2017).

Almost all these analyses showed the relevance of some crops highly concentrated in terms of land property and featured by particularly unequal patterns of income generation and rent appropriation. These activities resulted in the massive extraction of agrarian resources directed, with little degree of transformation, towards final foreign markets. This agrarian structure is also associated with political systems in which oligarchic sectors are widely represented. This historical, economic, social and political

construction is called *agro-extractivism* (Acosta, 2011; Gudynas, 2019; McKay *et al.*, 2021; Veltmeyer & Ezquerro-Cañete, 2023). Thus, agro-extractivism is related with the idea of unequal exchange, understood not only in monetary but also in physical and energetic terms (Campbell, 2009; Krausmann & Langthaler, 2019; Moore, 2017).

However, agro-extractivism takes different forms in different countries, specifically in Latin America. In some cases, the base is the production of cereals, oilseeds and meat (Argentina, Brazil or Paraguay) (Cadenazzi, 2011; Lapegna, 2017; Neiman & Blanco, 2020; Søndergaard, 2023; Wesz Junior, 2022). In other cases, there have been relatively recent changes, with some economies (Chile or Mexico) since the mid-1970s specializing in the production of fruits and vegetables, such as avocados and tomatoes (Gwynne, 1999; Madariaga *et al.*, 2021). By contrast, other countries maintain more traditional agro-extractive structures based on secularly produced crops (coffee, bananas, cotton, etc.).

Ecuador is a case of particular interest because of its dual agrarian structure. On the one hand, Ecuador has strong “traditional” tropical crops whose production is destined for export. In this sense, Ecuador presents greater affinity, albeit with nuances, with some Central American countries (Martí i Puig & Baumeister, 2017). On the other hand, Ecuador has an important share of its agricultural production oriented towards its domestic market. Finally, Ecuador has strong social movements related to the idea of food sovereignty which have been particularly active in the recent years (Bréton, 2008; Clark, 2016, 2017; Goodwin, 2017; Ponce-Molina *et al.*, 2015).

The domestic market orientation of some specific crops is also observed in practically all Latin American countries, but with peculiarities that are interesting to highlight. In those countries where the exports are based on the trinomial cereals, oilseeds and meat, there is effectively an overlap between export activity and attention to the domestic market. In the remaining cases, there is a relevant domestic orientation of some crops, but usually this is compatible with recurrent needs for importing grains such as wheat, corn or rice, thus significantly reducing their levels of food sovereignty (Gaviria, 2011; Jensen, 2021; Moreno-Sáenz *et al.*, 2017).

The Ecuadorian case was extensively studied, but most analyses refer either to specific crops at scales below the state (Villalba *et al.*, 2023) or to specific food relations such as the operation of labor markets (Martínez Valle, 2017), the effects of agrarian reforms (Bréton, 2008; Goodwin, 2017), or the reasons of socio-environmental conflicts (Clark, 2017). However, a long-term vision for the whole of Ecuador’s diverse agri-food production is lacking. To the knowledge of the authors, this is the first study

that develops a comprehensive overview of the long-term evolution of Ecuadorian agri-food production during a period covering the last third of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century.

The emphasis is on historicising food relations in Ecuador, placing the analysis in a middle position between the *abstract globalism* of a strictly structural approach and the *abstract localism* of some post-structuralist explanations (Coq Huelva, 2005; Tilzey, 2019b). Thus, the objective of the research is to analyse the evolution of food relations in Ecuador between 1964 and 2007, considering both the limits derived from Ecuadorian international specialisation and Ecuadorian internal socio-economic articulation, as well as decisions taken, at different historical moments, by different agents.

In this sense, this analysis has several particularly noteworthy elements. Firstly, the transformations in food relations are framed within broader evolutionary patterns of change of the Ecuadorian economy and society. Secondly, such changes are also placed in relation to more general transformations in food relations in Latin America. Thirdly, the analysis explicitly includes demography as a factor that shapes food relations. In this sense, we made an attempt to integrate criticisms such as those made by Bernstein (2016: 637) “The lack of any demographic dimension in food regime analysis is striking and is highlighted by contributions [...] which actually say nothing about the (growing) numbers who have to eat”.

Finally, the analysis focuses on changes in four key areas: production structures, agro-extractivism, food sovereignty and diet. The choice of these four areas must be understood as a way of operating the definition of food regimes, exposed above. Thus, diet and its changes are related to the dynamics of food demand. Similarly, we analyse the production structures of the different existing crops. Finally, the concepts of food sovereignty and agro-extractivism are used here as a way of approximating food governance, that is, the “rule governed structure” of the above definition. In any case, food sovereignty is a complex concept related to different issues (right to food, food security, external independence, environmental sustainability, etc.), some of them with a strong normative content (Rivas & Cussó, 2023).

The overall research has been performed essentially by exploiting statistical sources. Within these, the database on foreign trade and, particularly, on agricultural and livestock production of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAOSTAT) has been of special relevance. Other international sources have also been reviewed, such as economic and population statistics of the World Bank. Similarly, Ecuadorian statistical sources have been also reviewed (agrarian censuses or the National Information System

of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries, etc). All this statistical information has been interpreted on the basis of the existing academic literature.

The main findings of this paper are presented in a particularly stylised form, selecting those indicators that best illustrate the different elements. In this context, this article is epistemologically and analytically based on a twofold contribution. On the one hand, a political economy approach is used to analyse the specificities of the Ecuadorian case. This is based on classical ECLAC¹ works (Bielschowsky, 1998) as well as other approaches that highlight the relevance of contingent elements, as the result of internal power relations (Escobar, 2008; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). On the other hand, FRT is going to be used. Both political economy approach and FRT have structuralist and institutionalist components (Boyer & Saillard, 2002; McMichael, 2009a; Tilzey, 2019a). In this sense, following the epistemological orientations of critical realism, both are used as intermediate theories (Lawson, 2003; Sayer, 2000).

The text is organized as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework of this article and reviews the recent evolution of food relations and policies in Latin America in order to frame the Ecuadorian case. The third section presents the particularities that make Ecuador an interesting case study, focusing on the chronology used and the reasons that support its adoption. The fourth section describes the main characteristics of the SFR in Ecuador. The fifth section carries out a similar analysis of the TFR. The sixth section presents the conclusions.

2. FOOD REGIMES AND AGRO-EXTRACTIVISM IN LATIN AMERICA

The number of food regimes and their exact chronology have been widely discussed. Originally Friedmann (1982) and Friedmann and McMichael (1989) distinguished two food regimes, which they called the First Food Regime (FFR) and the Second Food Regime (SFR). The SFR has also been referred to as the “Mercantile-Industrial Food Regime” (Friedmann, 2005a), the “US Food Regime” (Winders, 2009a) or the “Political Productivist Food Regime” (Tilzey, 2019b). Also, Friedmann (1982), Friedmann and McMichael (1989), Pritchard (1998), Pechlaner and Otero (2010) or Holt and Shattuck (2011), discussed the possibility of the existence, from the mid-1970s onwards, of a TFR. This is also called the “Corporate Food Regime” (McMichael 2009a) or “Neoliberal Food Regime” (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010). Nonetheless, those are periodisations with some controversy. For example, Tilzey (2019b)

1. Abbreviation of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

adds a number of configurations prior to the FFR. Similarly, he asserts the existence of a last food regime, subsequent to the TFR, which he calls the “Post-Neoliberal Food Regime”.

The SFR covered the period from 1930 to 1980 (Tilzey, 2019b). SFR was based on

massive increases productivity and absolute increases in yields produced cheap wage foods from within the nation for the industrial proletariat [...] Restructuring was undertaken to favour capitalist family farm, with the state engineering a farmer road to capitalism [...] Productivism led, over time, to over-supply (over-production) of agri-food commodities leading downward pressure on prices, and increased subsidy burden in what was a state-supported system and, thereby, to increased pressure to export surpluses, principally to global South (Tilzey, 2019b: 239).

The previous sentence summarizes the main changes associated with the SFR. From a production perspective, the SFR was featured by the widespread application of new techniques (hybrid seeds, inorganic fertilizers, pesticides) that significantly increased yields (McMichael, 2009b). Moreover, from a governance perspective, this production was centered around three major complexes: cereals, livestock and durable goods (Friedmann, 1992). Also, from the perspective of international relations, the SFR was characterized by the hegemony of the United States. This meant that the regulation of agricultural activity inside the US had global effects, for example, in terms of the exercise of active policies to place the growing grain surpluses on international markets, sometimes with the help of mechanisms like food aid (Friedmann, 1982; Winders, 2009a). Also, from a regulatory point of view, the SFR was characterized by the exclusion of food from the GATT agreements, which gave great freedom –at least from a strictly legal perspective– to impose tariff and non-tariff barriers to food imports. This framework was massively used in the economies of the Global North in order to promote the development of their agricultural systems (Magnan, 2012; McMichael, 2009b; Winders, 2009b). Finally, from a nutrition and consumption perspective, there was a profound change in diets, which became based on high intakes of animal proteins, oils and fats, sugars and processed carbohydrates (Dixon, 2009; Friedmann, 1992; Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; Otero *et al.*, 2018).

In contrast, the TFR covered the period from 1980 to 2010. TFR is characterised by maintaining a large part of the previously existing patterns of production and consumption, even encouraging a deepening of these patterns (Patel, 2012). However, in TFR it became increasingly relevant:

Reciprocal relation between imperial transnational capital and the agro-exporting in the periphery led to the exploitation of ever larger areas in the latter for export of agricultural commodities to the North. The North however refused for itself to embrace fully free market norms, retaining primarily for reasons of political legitimacy, generous although increasingly decoupled support for its farmers (Tilzey, 2019b: 240).

In other words, FRT insists that there was a change in the model of global food governance that transferred a large part of its control elements from a network of states to a network of large transnational corporations (McMichael, 2009b). Within this corporate network, large retailing companies have come to play an increasingly important role (Burch & Lawrence, 2009; Magnan, 2012). In terms of diet, there is also a general continuity that is reflected in the high average consumption of meat, proteins, fats and processed carbohydrates (Dixon, 2009; Otero *et al.*, 2018). However, there is a strong nutritional criticism that particularly affects some high-income population segments. This leads to the growing emergence of “class diets”, based on a differentiated consumption essentially of fruit and vegetables (Dixon, 2009; Friedmann, 1992; Otero *et al.*, 2018). The element of “class” is also present in the growing relevance of quality segments, which can be synthesized in the appearance of a growing difference between the search for “cheap calories” using “food from nowhere” and the differentiated consumption channels that valorize “food from somewhere” (Friedmann, 2005b; Otero *et al.*, 2018; Schermer, 2015; Tilzey, 2019a). This, in turn, implied some changes in structures of production and international specialisation, as the new fruit and vegetable crops became concentrated in a few new-producer countries (Dolan & Humphrey, 2004; Friedmann, 1993).

In the global context of SFR and TFR is useful to situate Latin America’s role. This presentation will be made taking both general analyses (Magnan, 2012; McMichael, 2009a, 2009b; Otero, 2012; Tilzey, 2018a, 2019b), and especially, studies on the evolution of patterns of food production and consumption in different Latin American countries (Lapegna, 2017; Martí i Puig & Baumeister, 2017; Piñeiro & Cardeillac, 2017; Purcell, 2017; Søndergaard, 2023; Webber, 2017).

2.1. SFR in Latin America: Effects, determinants, and opportunities for action

From the XIXth century Latin America was economically specialized in the massive provision of some foods. In this sense, agro-extractivism, was a “foundational” feature of Latin American countries. The SFR implies several of transformations over the

immediately preceding model of food relations². Firstly, focusing on the cereals, the fact that the US strengthened its grain exporting capacity and that Europe turned into surplus, meant a drastic reduction in international markets for Latin American exports (González Esteban, 2018). Although there was a rise in world's population that resulted in new food markets, those were largely covered by the surplus exports from the Global North. For example, India, which was a net exporter of grains until the 1940s, began to absorb 25% of US wheat production in the early 1970s (Friedmann, 2005b). Consequently, some of the areas that specialized in cereal production, such as the Argentine Pampas, underwent a crisis that required a restructuring of their economy over an extended period. In this context, several adaptation processes resulted in a change in crops, for instance, from wheat to vegetable oils (Cadenazzi, 2011).

During the SFR, in the Global South in general and especially in Latin America, despite the deficit in many basic foods (particularly cereals), the possibility for designing public policies and, particularly, the use of subsidies was not generally exercised (Barraclough & Domike, 1966; González Esteban, 2018)³. Hence, until its end in the 1970s, tariff systems inspired in Import Substitution in Latin America had a manufacturing bias, being associated with the idea of industrialisation (Hirschman, 1968; Prebisch, 1949). Thus, in the case of agricultural production, to keep prices low, shock imports were often favoured, which resulted in foreign dependence on crops such as wheat, maize and rice (Barraclough & Domike, 1966; Friedmann, 1992; Gaviria, 2011; Jensen, 2021; Moreno *et al.*, 2017)⁴. This explains why the food sovereignty component did not act in this period as a defining element of the policies applied (Rivas & Cussó, 2023).

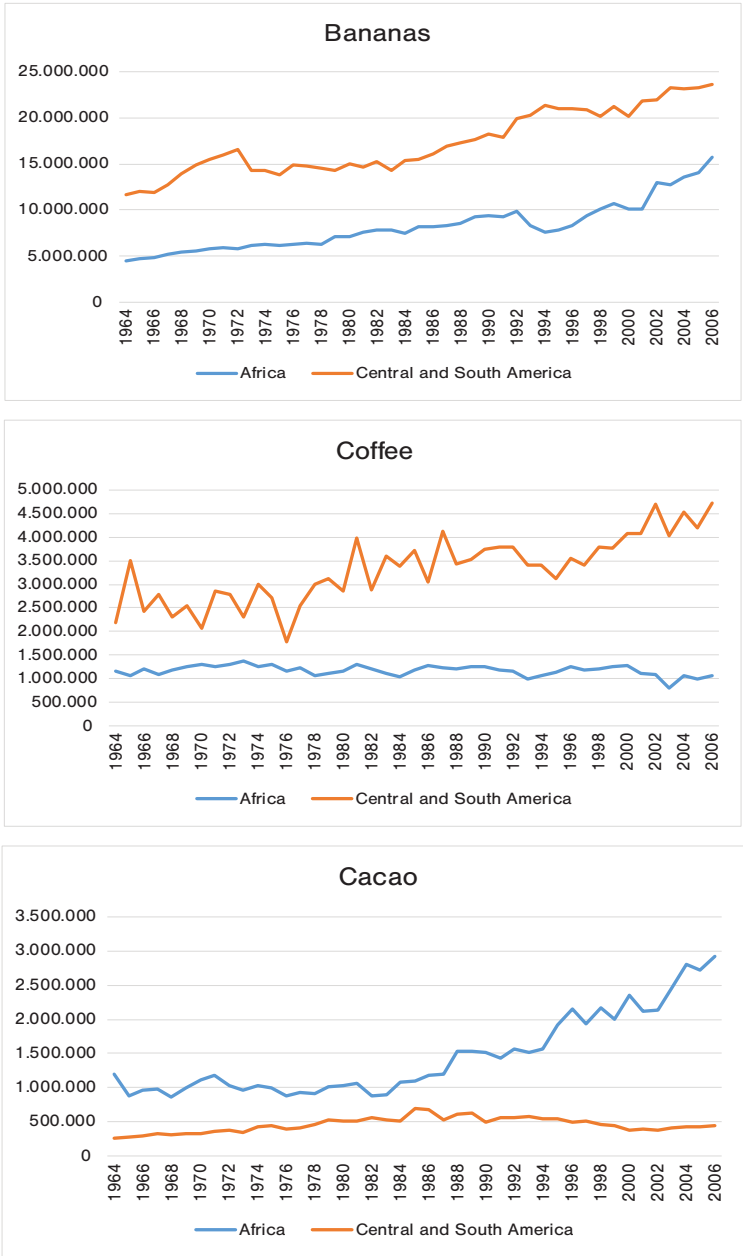
SFR was characterised by the development of the durable food complex which promoted the substitution of tropical productions by new industrially obtained inputs, particularly sugars and fats (Friedmann, 1992). However, there was no relevant development of industrial substitutes for crops as banana, coffee and cacao. Moreover, although new producers appeared in East Asia and Africa (Talbot, 2002; Wessel & Quist-Wessel, 2015), Latin America continued to have a world leadership position that was not substantially threatened (except in the case of cacao in which its role was already secondary at the beginning of the period) (see Fig. 1). Thus, the shock associated with the emergence of the SFR was comparatively weaker.

2. This model is the FFR.

3. Although not in the Ecuadorian case, as will be seen below, where during an important period a minimum price policy was established for different cereals.

4. This is obviously not observed in those countries specialised in the production of cereals, oilseeds and meat (Argentina, Brazil or Paraguay).

FIGURE 1
Bananas, coffee and cocoa production from 1964 to 2006 (in tonnes)



Source: FAOSTAT.

Instead, the most important policies implemented in Latin America during the SFR were the land reforms. In the context of developmentalist states, which applied import substitution policies (Botella & González Esteban, 2021), agrarian reforms occurred in countries such as Colombia (1962), Brazil (1964) (Morales, 2016), Ecuador (1964) (Bréton, 2008), Peru (1968) (Kay, 1982) and partially in Chile between 1964 and 1973 (Bellisario, 2007). Being complex interventions that sought to change the overall economic operation by inducing a better distribution of income, agrarian reforms were difficult to access as a whole (Bielschowsky, 1998). Regarding one of its major objectives, which was the rise of internal economic articulation and the reduction of food import needs, the outcome of agrarian reforms was not particularly successful. For instance, in 1973, Chile still had a negative food trade balance (Bellisario, 2007). Also, in other countries such as Venezuela, the food production capacity was severely deteriorated (Purcell, 2017).

2.2. A questioned TFR: Intensification and territorial extension of agri-extractivism in Latin America

Latin America was deeply affected by transformations associated with the emergence of the TFR. The turning point of the SFR was the debt crisis of the early 1980s (Helwege, 1990). This crisis was followed by structural adjustment plans that strongly promoted external openness and export promotion (Weeks, 1995), which, in turn, were the origin of the three processes that defined the subsequent evolution of food relations. First, there was an unprecedented growth of agribusiness around grain production, based on corn and soybeans, not only in traditional grain-producing areas such as Uruguay (Piñeiro & Cardeillac, 2017) and the Argentine Pampas (Neiman & Blanco, 2020), but also in large regions of the Amazon (Lima *et al.*, 2011) and countries as Paraguay (Wesz Junior, 2022) or Bolivia (McKay, 2018). Second, there was an increase in the physical production of traditional tropical crops such as coffee and bananas⁵ (see Fig. 1). Finally, new fruit and vegetable productions emerged, associated with nutritional criticism and segmentation of food consumption. For instance, there was an increase in Chilean avocado or kiwifruit exports (Gwynne, 1999; Madariaga *et al.*, 2021).

3. THE ECUADORIAN CASE SPECIFICITIES

Ecuador is a particularly interesting case of study because of two essential reasons. First, Ecuador has a strong agri-export vocation with a particularly long history in

5. Not in cacao because increases in physical outputs were concentrated in Africa.

crops such as cacao or bananas (Fenton, 2020; Larrea *et al.*, 1987; Reyna, 2023). Specifically, between 1961 and 1963, their three main tropical crops, that is, bananas, cacao, and coffee, accounted for more than 90% of the value of agricultural exports⁶. In this sense, it is interesting to analyse how a reality with such well-established crops responds to changes in global food demand that have led to the growth of other crops such as fruit and vegetables, which have changed, for example, the productive reality of other Latin American countries such as Chile or Mexico (Gwynne, 1999; Mada-riaga *et al.*, 2021).

Second, Ecuador produces not only tropical foods but also other agricultural products, mainly cereals and tubers as rice, corn, potato, wheat, and cassava. These products are almost exclusively sold in the domestic market. In 1963, Ecuador was essentially self-sufficient in rice, corn, potato, and cassava but imported 38.4% of its apparent consumption of wheat⁷. This capacity to supply the domestic market with key crops is not generalised in Latin America, especially in those countries that do not base their export specialisation in the cereals and oilseeds. Therefore, the extent to which this capacity is maintained is interesting to be analysed (Barracough & Domike, 1966; Friedmann, 1992; Gaviria, 2011; Jensen, 2021; Moreno *et al.*, 2017).

Moreover, Ecuadorian production of cereals and tubers had an important peasant base. Still in 1962, 57% of the active population was employed in agricultural activities⁸. The maintenance of cereals and tubers was related to the right to food and food security which are the base of the concept of food sovereignty (Rivas & Cussó, 2023). These crops, except rice, are essentially cultivated in the highlands, which illustrates another characteristic feature of Ecuadorian agricultural production: its sharp regional specialization. Export-oriented tropical crops dominate on the coast, while the highlands' crops are mostly oriented towards the domestic market.

This collection of different crops with such diverse social and environmental foundations is also an example of structural duality (Bielschowsky, 1998). On the one hand, the agrarian-exporting segments were forced to be more rationalized and modernized to compete in international markets. This higher capitalisation was reflected in higher yields. For example, banana yields in Ecuador in 1963 were 87.3% higher than the world average⁹. On the other hand, the grains sectors were limited to the domestic market

6. Own elaboration based on FAOSTAT data.

7. Source: FAOSTAT.

8. Source: Ecuador Census, 1962.

9. Source: FAOSTAT.

that guaranteed demand and certain protection against international competitors. This allowed for lower levels of modernisation. For example, in 1963 wheat yields in Ecuador were more than 30% lower than the world average and maize yields more than 60%¹⁰. Ecuador was also characterized by a long tradition of struggle for land by indigenous and peasant sectors which has mainly affected the highlands and the crops oriented to the domestic market. This element is closely associated with the concept of food sovereignty (Bréton, 2008; Clark, 2016; Goodwin, 2017; Whitten *et al.*, 2003).

The theoretical framework of this research insists on the role of states in global dynamics, understanding them in an evolutionary way and focusing on the specific case of Latin America. Accordingly, Ecuador's position in the complex framework of global interactions is explored, placing special emphasis on four main factors: transformation in production structures, agro-extractivism, food sovereignty and changes in diet. The analysis undertaken can contribute to answering some of the following questions.

- In what sense does the existence of a particularly “old” agro-extractivism based on crops such as bananas or cacao, with almost two centuries of history and significant penetration in global value chains, affect the evolution of the Ecuadorian food system as a whole?
- What is the role of tropical crop exports in a country where the economy has been based on oil exports since the mid-1970s? Does the emergence of new sources of income and foreign currencies (namely oil) weaken or strengthen the role of agriculture, both in terms of exports and domestic self-sufficiency?
- Have there been in Ecuador any relevant non-traditional agricultural exports since the 1980s¹¹, following the model of other Latin American countries such as Chile or Mexico (Gwynne, 1999; Madariaga *et al.*, 2021)?
- Has Ecuador developed agribusiness and increased its exports of soya and meat following the example of Bolivia or Paraguay?¹²

10. Source: FAOSTAT.

11. Different studies have highlighted the emergence of non-traditional agricultural exports in Ecuador, but they do not analyse their importance in relative terms over traditional exports and their evolution over time (MARTÍNEZ VALLE, 2017).

12. These two countries, despite not being traditional grain producers, have in recent years developed important grain and soybean production complexes for export, as documented in different studies (McKAY, 2018; WEBBER, 2017; WESZ JUNIOR, 2022).

- How has Ecuador's level of self-sufficiency in basic dietary products such as rice, corn or potatoes evolved? Was there a growing deficit in certain cereals supply, as happened in Chile or Mexico (Gaviria, 2011; Jensen, 2021; Moreno *et al.*, 2017)?
- To what extent this evolution is related with broader processes of promotion of food sovereignty, not only by the State, but also by other social agents?

Finally, it should be noted that one of the most important elements when applying the FRT to the study of national realities is the adaptation of the chronology. Food regimes are global by definition. However, the change in food relations is not automatic and can lead to different temporalities in different places. Relatively traumatic episodes, as international crisis, are usually necessary for any structural change in food relations. But contingent factors may act in specific countries or regions, making these pressures not sufficiently relevant to generate structural changes. For this reason, at national scales, the different food regimes can be advanced or delayed in time (Ríos-Núñez & Coq-Huelva, 2015).

Accordingly the Ecuadorian case presents three distinctive elements. First, the relevance of export crops, the affluent financial resources obtained from their sale, and specific international situations (such as the sharp drop in banana production in Central America in the 1950s) led to a lag in the emergence of the SFR. In fact, coinciding with the period of full operation of the import substitution model, which was also delayed in the Ecuadorian case, the SFR was not clearly perceptible until the early 1960s (Acosta, 2006). Secondly, the traumatic moment that signalled the transition from the SFR to the TFR was the debt crisis of the early 1980s (Weiss, 1997). Finally, the intensity of the resistance and protests against the TFR led to the testing of a new approach to food relations that, at least rhetorically, broke with the TFR's corporate foundations. Thus, from 2007 to 2017, which coincided with the presidencies of Rafael Correa, food relations in Ecuador were substantially modified. For reasons of space this last phase is not analysed in this text (Clark, 2016, 2017; McKay, 2018). In any case, the periodification proposed for Ecuador coincides quite closely, at least in its final part, with the proposal globally defended by Tilzey (2019b).

4. SFR IN ECUADOR (1964-82)¹³

4.1. General dynamics of socio-economic transformation affecting food relations in Ecuador

Some elements summarise the main changes perceived in this period. First, there was a reinforcement of the domestic market. On the one hand, between 1964 and 1982, the Ecuadorian population increased from 5 million to 8.5 million¹⁴. On the other hand, GDP per capita grew more than sixfold in constant terms, from \$440 in 1964 to \$2,660 in 1982¹⁵. Second, from an economic point of view, the beginning of oil exploitation in 1973 radically transformed the Ecuadorian economy and dramatically displaced bananas as the main source of foreign currencies (Aguilar, 1986). Finally, Ecuador was governed during this period by a succession of military and civilian dictatorships, with a brief democratic interlude of only three years. Sometimes, as for example, the military dictatorship led by General Rodríguez Lara between 1972 and 1976, prevailing policies and political discourses had a strong nationalist imprint (Bravo & Pérez Enríquez, 2020).

Two sub-periods can be considered, from 1964 to 1973 and from 1973 to 1979. The first sub-period witnessed a strong international economic expansion and a geopolitical context dominated by the Cold War and shaped by the validity of US policy with a developmentalist profile known as the Alliance for Progress (Botella & González Esteban, 2021). The second sub-period witnessed an international economic stagnation in which developmentalist rhetoric ideology was maintained but with significantly lower international support. However, the situation of abundant liquidity that resulted from the beginning of oil exploitation meant that the international economic stagnation had a very limited impact on Ecuadorian domestic economic performance. In fact, the average GDP growth rate in Ecuador between 1973 and 1980 was 7.3%¹⁶.

13. We understand the SFR in Ecuador to cover the period from the early 1964 to 1982. The choice of 1964 is explained first because of the rationale for the establishment of the SFR was delayed because of the situation resulting from Second World War. Moreover, in the case of Ecuador, the relatively favourable balance of payments situation meant that the tensions leading to a change in food relations were not perceptible until the early 1960s. It was at this time that the effects of the “banana crisis” became fully visible, leading to a restructuring of agricultural activities.

14. Source: World Bank.

15. Source: World Bank.

16. Source: World Bank.

In this context, two agrarian reforms took place. The 1964 Agrarian Reform and the Colonization Law aimed at correcting the defects of the agrarian structure and the distribution of land, being inspired by relatively successful land reforms in different Asian countries (Botella & González Esteban, 2021; Patel, 2012). This reform eliminated non-commercial forms of labor and promoted the redistribution of an important share of the existing large farms (Bréton, 2008). Nevertheless, the effects did not reach their full potential due to the lack of State support in areas such as access to credit or agricultural extension services (Botella & González Esteban, 2021). This explains why the 1973 Agrarian Reform was characterized by a more productivist orientation, using preferentially levels of land use and land yields as criteria for the expropriations (Bréton, 2008; Goodwin, 2017). Also, the existence of higher financial resources coming from oil revenues resulted in greater support from the State (Ruff, 1984).

4.2. Transformation of food relations in Ecuador during the SFR (1964-82)

4.2.1. Export-oriented tropical crops

At the beginning of the 1960s, bananas generated 2/3 of food exports in Ecuador. However, a crisis in international banana prices from the 1960s onwards, named the “banana crisis”, led to a transformation in the export structure (Larrea, 1982). Exports were much more diversified by 1980-82, with the share of bananas in total food exports falling to 38.0%. At the same time, coffee exports increased their share to 23.5%¹⁷. In other words, the traditional agro-export structure was restructured and diversified but did not disappear. Not even the relative appreciation of the Ecuadorian currency as a result of oil exploitation weakened agro-export specialization. This is especially noteworthy because the rapid growth of oil production affected agricultural production, in many other cases as Nigeria (Otaha, 2012), Venezuela (Purcell, 2017), Sudan (Langa & Coq-Huelva, 2019), Guyana (Hardyal *et al.*, 2023), Trinidad and Tobago (Hosein & Tewarie, 2004) and Equatorial Guinea (Pale Miré & Djieoulou, 2020). In part, this resilience of export crops in Ecuador is explained by the implementation of agrarian extension policies financed with oil resources. Additionally, export taxes were progressively (albeit a little erratically) eliminated and research structures were created. Major irrigation projects were also financed, as well as new plantations (Ruff, 1984).

17. Throughout this section, the 1961-63 average will be compared with the 1980-82 average, using FAOSTAT data on production, cultivated area, yields, exports, and imports. These data are considered representative of the situation at the just before the start and at the end of the SFR.

Actually, there was a strong technical rationalization of farms. In the case of bananas, technical improvements induced an increase in yields of almost 45%¹⁸. The cacao area under cultivation increased by more than 22% and there was a 65% increase in yields¹⁹. Both phenomena led to a doubling of production in the period. Contrarily, the growth in coffee production (57%) was entirely due to the increase in cultivated area (almost doubling), as average yields fell by more than 25%²⁰.

In short, the agro-export sector did not weaken its position to the extent that would have been expected, showing high levels of resilience. However, because of the strong growth of the Ecuadorian economy between 1964 and 1982, the share of coffee, cacao, and banana exports in Ecuadorian GDP fell from 7.1% to 2.5%²¹. That is, the relative importance of the agro-extractivist logic significantly dropped despite the relevance of the technical rationalization processes.

4.2.2. Cereals and tubers for the internal market

Between 1961 and 1963, Ecuador was self-sufficient in rice, maize, potatoes, and cassava but dependent on wheat imports. Between 1964 and 1982, Ecuador's population grew by 70.8%²². In a first approach, this level provides a reliable indicator for assessing whether the growth of cereal and tuber production is sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the population. Growth was well above for rice (92.5%), slightly above for maize (75.2%), and well below for potatoes (32.9)²³. Several reasons explain the sharp increase in the production of rice, maize and, to a lesser extent, potatoes. Cultivated areas in general remained unchanged, and only in the case of rice was there moderate growth (21% over the 18 years considered). Thus, the main reason for the increase in production was the application of the technological packages associated with the green revolution. These packages led to a significant increase in yields, especially in the case of rice (93%) and maize (75%). The Ecuadorian State favoured this expansion through the financing of those packages, the establishment of minimum prices for farmers, and the

18. See note 17.

19. See note 17.

20. See note 17.

21. See note 17. Own elaboration based on GDP data in nominal terms in US dollars obtained from the World Bank and export data in nominal terms in US dollars obtained from FAOSTAT.

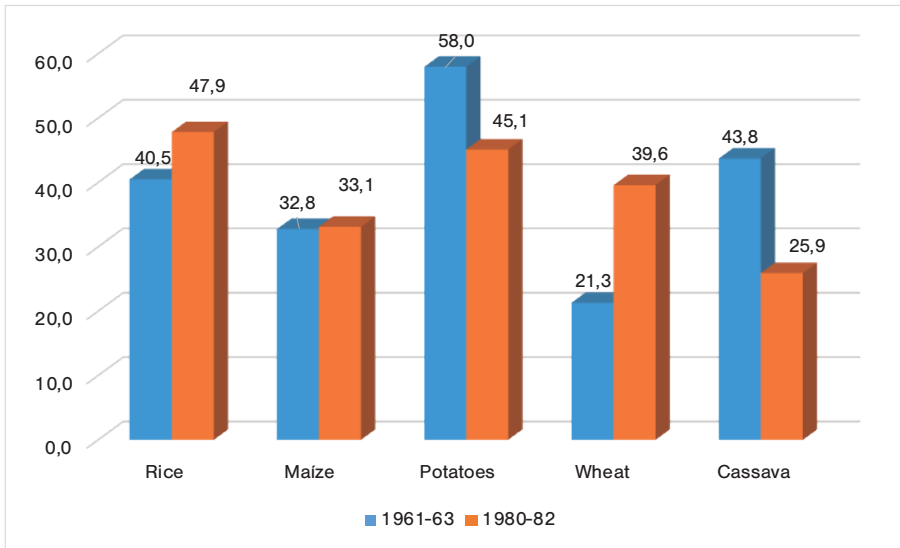
22. Source: FAOSTAT.

23. See note 17.

creation of agencies such as ENAC²⁴ which made substantial purchases of production at officially established prices (Ruff, 1984).

The exception was wheat. Its decline in production (-43.9%) was mainly explained by the reductions in cropped areas but also wheat yields fell significantly²⁵. This was related with the excessive distribution of farms as a consequence of the agrarian reform but also with other facts as the overvaluation of the Ecuadorian currency, the recourse to cheap imports, the effects of the US food aid policy and an inadequate pricing policy (Friedmann, 1982; Ponce-Molina *et al.*, 2015; Ruff, 1984).

FIGURE 2
Apparent consumption by inhabitant of cereals and tubers in Ecuador(kg/hab/yr)
during the Second Food Regime



Source: FAOSTAT.

Dietary changes were also very relevant as can be seen in Figure 2. There was a significant reduction in the consumption of potatoes and cassava, while there was an increase in rice and wheat. The fall in per capita consumption of potatoes explains why there were no significant imports of potatoes in this period. Similarly, almost 90%

24. Empresa Nacional de Almacenamiento y Comercialización (National Enterprise for Storage and Commercialization).

25. See note 17.

of Ecuador's domestic wheat consumption between 1980 and 1982 was supported on imports²⁶. In Ecuador, as in other countries of the Global South, wheat became the most relevant element of food dependency (Friedmann, 1992). This was associated with the situation of sustained growth in global wheat production and trade, as well as the existence of chronic surpluses in international markets (González Esteban, 2017).

There was also an increase in meat consumption. Average apparent meat consumption per inhabitant rose from 1 kg to 2.9 kg for chicken, from 5.9 to 6.9 for pork and from 7.9 to 9.1 for beef²⁷. These increases were relatively moderate and were covered by domestic production. In the case of chicken, the starting point was particularly low. In average, apparent per capita meat consumption increased by 27%²⁸.

5. TFR IN ECUADOR IN ITS NEOLIBERAL EXPRESSION (1983-2007)

5.1. General socio-economic transformations that affected food relations in Ecuador

The period of the TFR was shaped by important shifts in public intervention in the broader framework of the implementation of neoliberal policies. Two phases can be distinguished in Ecuadorian neoliberalism. The first phase, from 1982 to 1992, corresponded to the implementation of a gradualist approach to the adjustments required by international institutions (FMI, World Bank, etc.). The second phase, from 1993 to 2007, corresponded to the implementation of shock policies.

5.1.1. Neoliberalism and “gradual adjustments” (1982-92)

In the 1970s, Ecuador had good economic growth, being the average GDP growth rate of 7.3% between 1973 and 1980. However, between 1976 and 1979, there was an indiscriminate recourse to external credit that led to a sharp increment in private and public debt (Acosta, 1990). The fall in oil prices and the sudden downturn in the financial environment, which happened in the early 1980s, resulted in high interest rates and rationed credit (Chesnais, 2001). This situation forced Ecuador to sign seven letters of intent with the IMF between 1982 and 1992 and additional agreements with private banks and the

26. Source: FAOSTAT.

27. See note 17.

28. See note 17.

Club of Paris (Acosta, 1990). Moreover, there was a process of socialization of private debts (Acosta, 1990). Thus, through the Monetary Board of 1983, the *sucretización* of external private debts was enacted (Acosta, 1990)²⁹. Consequently, the debt of private entities (which was in dollars) was assumed by the Ecuadorian State (Hurtado, 2002).

Successive governments created new indirect taxes, eliminated subsidies, or raised the prices of public utilities (Thoumi & Grindle, 1992). In addition, they increased domestic debt and made greater use of money creation (Stornaiolo, 1995). This dynamic of adjustment limited the capacity for growth of the Ecuadorian economy. Between 1983 and 1992, average annual GDP grew 2.6%³⁰, which was much lower than the previous decade. As the population expanded at a very similar rate (2.4%), GDP per capita remained approximately at the same level³¹.

Ecuador's status as an oil exporter meant that the payment guarantees of the debt were greater, and more time was available for the implementation of the adjustment policies (Acosta, 1990). As well as weak economic growth, there were other strong macroeconomic imbalances. Thus, between 1983 and 1992, inflation was between 25% and 55% per year, with an average of 44.6%³². There was also a rising external debt. All those problems led to a prevailing sense of policy failure.

5.1.2. Neoliberal shock policies (1993-2007)

Even though the previously implemented policies did not perform well, their content was not questioned. Rather, it was believed that they had not been applied with sufficient intensity. Thus, the three presidencies that succeeded each other during this period promoted increasingly deregulation and liberalization measures. Duran Ballén's presidency (1992-96) deepened the lines of action that were developed previously, including modernization of the State, reduction of subsidies, etc. The most important novelty was that economic policies focused on facilitating foreign direct investment, and the establishment of legal foundations for privatizations (Ayala, 2015). All these measures were prerequisites for Ecuador's inclusion in the Brady Plan (Acosta, 2003). However, their impact on the Ecuadorian economy was low. During the period between

29. The sucre was the official currency of Ecuador until 2000.

30. Throughout this section, data from the World Bank has been used.

31. According to World Bank Data, Ecuadorian GDP per person remained at around USD 4,200 in constant 2010 values.

32. World Bank data.

1993 and 1998, GDP grew by an average of 3%³³, which was only slightly above the 2.6% of the previous decade. Meanwhile, there was an insufficient reduction of average inflation from 44.6% in the period 1983-92 to 31.1% in the period 1993-98³⁴.

The financial deregulation model resulted in sharp increases in credit (1993-94 and 1996-97), which was short-term, consumption-oriented, and led to a sharp increase in private debt (Páez Pérez, 2004). In turn, the demand for credit fuelled competition for deposits, which were sometimes attracted at extremely high nominal interest rates (11% in USD) (Vera, 2013). Thus, there appeared to be growing instability in the banking system that finally exploded in 1999, causing the bankruptcy of 17 banks that directly affected hundreds of thousands of individual savers (Vera, 2013). The Ecuadorian financial crisis also resulted in an unprecedented depreciation of the Ecuadorian currency, the sucre (Schuler, 2002). The financial crisis triggered a deep economic recession, with GDP falling by almost 5% in 1999 and inflation running at 100% in 2000³⁵.

The government headed by Gustavo Noboa enacted the dollar as only legal domestic currency since 13 December 2000. This meant the use of the most extreme form of “hard monetary anchoring” in the fight against inflation (Hausmann *et al.*, 1999). Dollarization made possible to control inflation, which in barely two years fell to less than two digits, a situation unknown since the early 1970s. However, the economic paralysis led to an unprecedented increase in the levels of poverty, which resulted in mass migration. Between 1999 and 2007, it was estimated that almost one million people left the country, which represented almost 15% of the active population (Herrera, 2008). This economic situation was accompanied by strong social tensions and movements against the implemented policies (Ayala, 2015; Vera, 2013). While higher oil prices and international remittances allowed GDP to recover relatively quickly, the social discontent created by 20 years of adjustment-based policies was translated into a different model of economic management from 2007 onwards.

5.2. Transformations of food relations in Ecuador during the neoliberal expression of the TFR (1983-2007)

Transformations in the socio-political environment and especially the succession of adjustment plans implied a change in the set of economic incentives that influenced the

33. Source: World Bank.

34. Source: World Bank.

35. Source: World Bank.

conduct of agrarian agents. On the one hand, this new socio-economic environment was associated with greater financial pressure that implied the reduction of subsidies but also of the activities of agricultural extension. In addition, adjustment plans prioritised the capacity to obtain foreign currencies in a context of commercial and capital liberalization. This situation, which stimulated an increase in production, produced a sharp increase in the cropped agricultural area, which rose from 1 million to almost 1.86 million hectares³⁶, resulting in an increase in the cropped area of more than 82% in just 35 years³⁷. Throughout this section, average data for the period 1983-85 (namely, corresponding to the beginning of the period analysed) are compared with those for the period 2004-06 (corresponding to the end of that period), using FAOSTAT data.

5.2.1. Export-oriented tropical crops

The new conditions of external indebtedness, conditionality, and adjustment of the 1980s crisis had as a corollary an increase in the activity of traditional export crops. Even though there was a notable rise in the export of bananas (247%, generating more than 88% of the total income in the period 2004-06), there was a general restriction on State's support activities as well as a shortage of liquidity in the private sector. This may be the reason why this growth was mainly the result of an increase in cropped areas, albeit not having substantial improvements in the management systems of the main export crops. This is particularly noteworthy because banana was the crop with the highest price rise, increasing 39.2%. Nevertheless, the prices of cacao and coffee fell by 15.8% and 40.7%, respectively. This situation resulted in cacao production becoming stagnant, with a 14.7% drop in yields, and the production of coffee falling more than 66% with a 37.6% drop in yields.

This set of changes demonstrated a substantial shift in the export structure from the previous situation of the banana-cacao-coffee trinomial to an essentially banana export monoculture. In nominal terms, there was a 203% increase in export revenue from these three crops; however, their weight in Ecuador's GDP only increased very

36. Those crop groups for which FAOSTAT provides direct data on cultivated areas have been considered, namely cereals, citrus fruits, sugar, fibre crops, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables, dried pulses, roots and tubers.

37. There are no aggregated data on land use in FAOSTAT dating back to the early 1980s. The earliest data are from the early 1990s. However, between 1990-92 and 2004-06 there was a loss of forest area in Ecuador of about one million hectares, which matches the process of increasing surface of crops mentioned in footnote 36.

moderately from 2.3% to 2.9%³⁸. Moreover, the cultivated area of these three crops together increased only moderately (8.8%). From this perspective, there is little support for the hypothesis of an increase in the agro-extractivist character of the Ecuadorian territory. Thus, in the TFR, traditional tropical crops were neither modernized nor diversified, nor can it even be said that the volume of exports increased substantially. In general terms, the traditional Ecuadorian agro-export structure was maintained but not significantly strengthened. In other words, contrary to other Latin American countries, agro-extractivism has not been strengthened during the TFR.

5.2.2. Non-traditional exports: Real relevance beyond rhetoric

In other Latin American countries, non-traditional food exports such as kiwi, avocado, etc. gained prominence from the 1980s onwards (Gwynne, 1999; Madariaga *et al.*, 2021). In order to identify non-traditional crops in Ecuador in this study, specific restrictive conditions were considered³⁹. Six emerging crops were identified⁴⁰ using these conditions, but only one of them (cauliflower and broccoli) exported most of its production at the end of the period (Le Gall, 2009). In any case, cauliflower and broccoli exports only represented 3.3% of the banana exports between 2004 and 2006. Thus, from a monetary perspective, there was no significant diversification of agri-food exports in Ecuador during this period. Therefore, Ecuador did not follow the agrarian transformation model of other countries such as Chile or Mexico (González, 2020; Gwynne, 1999; Madariaga *et al.*, 2021).

There was also a significant expansion in the cultivation of soybeans which production grew by 53%. However, net exports represented only 12.9% of total production between 2004 and 2006. In other words, there were not massive exports with little degree of transformation of soybean as in other countries as Bolivia, but rather a process of input substitution for livestock development (McKay, 2018).

Although non-traditional crops did not have remarkable impact on the export structure, the development of these crops influenced the Ecuadorian agrarian structure. In

38. Current value of exports by crop and current GDP taken from FAOSTAT.

39. In particular, we have considered production with an average of more than 5,000 hectares cultivated between 2004 and 2006 and with an average growth of more than 100% in cultivated area and physical production compared to the average between 1983 and 1985.

40. Mangoes, guavas and mangosteens, other tropical fruits, other fruits, cauliflower and broccoli, peas, and other fresh vegetables.

fact, they represented around 140,000 hectares, that is, a significant expansion of the agricultural frontier. In this sense, in the absence of outstanding exports, increases of more than 50% in the production of pears, papaya and of around 500% in plums, mangoes, or other tropical fruits had an important impact on the diet of the Ecuadorian population. In any case, this diversification of the diet is an element to be positively valued from a food sovereignty perspective.

5.2.3. Cereals and tubers for the internal market

Between 1983 and 2007, Ecuador's population grew strongly, by more than 5.2 million, which meant a relative increase of 52.3%. A first approximation to assess food security and the possibilities to fulfill right to food is to compare the rises in physical production and population growth. Figure 3 shows that there was a reduction in gross production capacity but especially in relation to the population in three of the basic staple foods (potatoes, wheat, and cassava). The situation of wheat was particularly delicate. In the early 1980s, Ecuador was importing more than 90% of final consumption, and the fall of more than 59% in domestic production in this period only aggravated this process. This was caused by a combination of agronomic problems (yellow rust disease) and the existence of low economic incentives, because of a policy that preferred to keep wheat prices low by subsidising imports, which, in turn, were already heavily subsidised in their own countries of origin (Ponce-Molina *et al.*, 2015). Thus, between 2004 and 2006, almost all (98%) of the wheat consumed in Ecuador was imported, with 95% coming from three countries: Canada (63.5%), the United States (26%), and Argentina (6%)⁴¹.

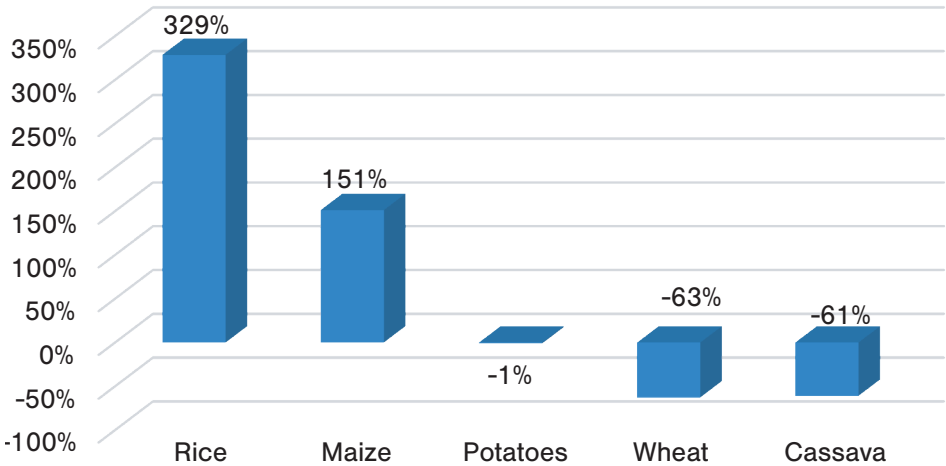
The stagnation in potato production was also noteworthy because although there was a 63% increase in the cropped area, yields fell by almost 40%. In a context of withdrawal of State support, there was a significant effort by producers, many of them peasants from the highlands, on the basis of an extensive growth of the surface area without any improvements in the agrarian management systems. Simultaneously, there was a dramatic change in diet, which resulted in a 35% reduction in per capita potato consumption.

Concurrently, there was an unprecedented increase in rice production that was more than five times higher than the increase in population. However, the growth in rice production was based on strong growth in cultivated areas, which tripled during this period, and a more modest increase in yields, which rose by 30%. This is also explained

41. Source: Detailed Trade Matrix. FAOSTAT.

by the fact that rice was one of the productions in which price subsidies continued to be relevant in this period (Guerrero, 2000). In the absence of exports, such a spectacular increase in production implied a sharp rise in per capita consumption (80%), which therefore also reflected a major change in diet.

FIGURE 3
Relative change in cereal and tuber production in Ecuador
from 1983-85 to 2004-06



Source: FAOSTAT.

Figure 4 shows that in 1960, the Ecuadorian diet was based on a balance between rice, maize, potato, wheat, and cassava. However, in the triennium 2004-06, it was essentially based on rice, with a minor accompanying role of wheat and potatoes. In this sense, apparent rice consumption levels in Ecuador (115 kg per inhabitant and year)⁴² were only slightly lower than those observed in China (136 kg)⁴³.

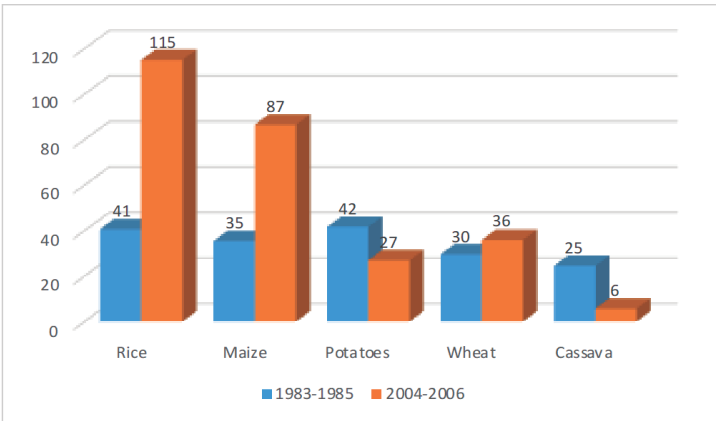
When talking about diet, it is also necessary to consider the sharp increase in meat consumption. As shown in Figure 5, the apparent consumption of beef per inhabitant grew by more than 60%, that of pork by more than 80%, and that of chicken multiplied almost fivefold. Moreover, imports of fresh or chilled meat have a very low share in final consumption. Thus, such growth in meat production suggests that a significant part of the increases in maize and soybean production were destined for livestock feeding.

42. Source: FAOSTAT.

43. Source: FAOSTAT.

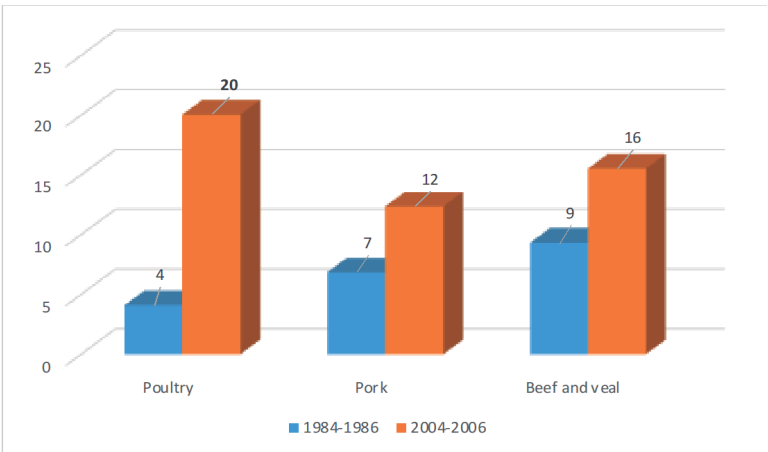
That is, an important part of the growth in the domestic agricultural production in Ecuador expressed in terms of an increase in the cultivated area could be explained by changes in the diet of the Ecuadorian population, and particularly an increasing consumption of meat.

FIGURE 4
Apparent consumption of cereals and tubers
by inhabitant in Ecuador (kg/hab/yr) during the TFR



Source: FAOSTAT.

FIGURE 5
Apparent consumption of fresh and refrigerated meat
by inhabitant in Ecuador (kg/hab/yr) during the TFR



Source: FAOSTAT.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The case of Ecuador illustrates many of the complex and often contradictory dynamics of the Second (SFR) and Third Food Regimes (TFR) in Latin America. In order to analyse this, we asked a set of questions in the third section which we are recapitulating now. Ecuador had an agri-export vocation of an extractivism nature that has been centered since the 19th century around the three main crops: banana, cacao, and coffee. What does this imply for Ecuador's agrarian structure as a whole? This agri-exporting vocation has proved to be particularly resilient partly because of its historical tradition and its centrality in the Ecuadorian social structure. It should be reminded that first cacao (in the 19th century) and then bananas (until 1963) were the basis for the economic specialisation of the Ecuadorian economy. Moreover, some of the most relevant local capitals, owned in some cases by noteworthy families, were nucleated around those crops (Fenton, 2020; Larrea *et al.*, 1987). Also, the support of the State at key moments was relevant. In this sense, during the SFR, export crops survived not only a particularly negative international situation (the "banana crisis") but also the exploitation of oil fields, which resulted in an abundant source of foreign currency that could have led to their destruction ("Dutch disease"). On the contrary, farms were modernized, and yield increased significantly. This situation contrasts with the experience of other Latin American and African countries (Venezuela, Nigeria, etc.) where massive oil extraction led to a reduction of the weight of their agricultural activities and levels of food sovereignty.

Traditional agri-export specializations in Ecuador were also maintained during the TFR, and their share of the GDP even increased slightly. However, many investment processes were interrupted, and yields stagnated (bananas) or fell significantly (cacao and coffee). This can be seen from a twofold perspective. On the one hand, the implementation of neoliberal policies did not imply an increase in the technical efficiency of export crops. On the other hand, neither there is evidence of a greater impact—at least territorially—of agro-extractivism. In fact, the surface area devoted to cacao, coffee, and banana crops stagnated over the 44 years analyzed.

Have there been any relevant non-traditional agricultural exports since the 1980s? In Ecuador, there was a diversification that allowed for the emergence of significant production of fruits (plums, mangoes, papayas, other tropical fruits, etc.) and vegetables. However, they were mainly addressed to domestic markets. From this perspective, there is no strengthening of agro-extractivism nor a substantial change in the form of agricultural extraction as observed in countries such as Mexico or Chile (González, 2020; Gwynne, 1999; Madariaga *et al.*, 2021). Rather, dietary diversification can be associated with higher levels of food sovereignty.

Is there a relevant expansion of agribusiness following the model of some emerging Latin American producers such as Bolivia or Paraguay? Something similar happened with the production of maize and oilseeds. There was a relevant growth in production and cropped area, but it was mainly directed to the Ecuadorian domestic market, specifically for animal feed being related to the strong increase in meat consumption. In this sense, the Ecuadorian case also (McKay, 2018; Neiman & Blanco, 2020; Piñeiro & Cardeillac, 2017; Wesz Junior, 2022).

How has Ecuador's level of self-sufficiency in basic dietary products (rice, corn, potatoes, etc.) evolved? SFR and TFR made Ecuador totally dependent on imports of wheat. The growing dependence on wheat imports was observed in many developing economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America (González Esteban, 2018). However, two other facts should also be highlighted. The first is that Ecuador was essentially self-sufficient in cassava, potatoes, and particularly rice throughout the period under analysis. The second is that the Ecuadorian diet has dramatically changed, with rice becoming the most important cereal consumed. This capacity to change consumer habits allowed to guarantee food security and the right to food for large groups of the population.

In a nutshell, despite the high imports of wheat, Ecuador achieved significant levels of food self-sufficiency in terms of overall cereal and tuber production despite its population tripled in the 44 years analyzed. Thus, neither the population growth, the exploitation of the oil fields nor the external opening-up policies implemented after the 1982 debt crisis substantially altered the country's capacity for food self-sufficiency, except in the case of wheat. However, preservation of relatively high levels of food sovereignty, especially in the context of TFR, was more the result of the private agents' capacities of adaptation than of the public policies developed by the State.

This conclusion is strengthened if agriculture's share in GDP and employment is considered. In this sense, even though there was a process of slow decline in the share of agriculture in GDP, falling below 10% in 2007, a similar evolution was not observed in agricultural employment, which continued to represent 28.8% of total employment in 2007. Thus, the productivity levels of agricultural activities –and consequently salaries– were below the Ecuadorian average. Therefore, agriculture, or more specifically some crops and segments inside them, acted as a “refugee” sector that absorbed a structural excess of labour despite lower rents and salaries. That is, an important share of the population maintained a relevant link with agriculture, as a way of protection against changing economic conjunctures and of securing access to food. All this is coherent with the relevance of the component of food sovereignty (right to food, dietary diver-

sification, food security, national self-sufficiency, peasant production, etc.) in many of the observed changes. In any case, such observed changes are mainly related with three major facts: 1) The Ecuadorian population grew⁴⁴; 2) a significant part of the Ecuadorian population continued to maintain a direct link with agriculture⁴⁵; and 3) Ecuadorians started to eat particularly more meat⁴⁶.

Beyond the Ecuadorian case, some broader conclusions, can be drawn. Although agro-extractivism activities were strongly developed in Latin America (Bellisario, 2007; González, 2020; Lapegna, 2017) or even in the Global South (Veltmeyer & Ezquerro-Cañete, 2023), there were significant differences among countries. Speaking of a generalized advance of Ecuadorian agro-extractivism between 1960 and 2007, it does not match reality and it even contributes to obscuring other processes such as the changes in diet or the fight of subaltern actors for the preservation of food sovereignty in a context characterised by a succession of adjustment policies that led to the emigration of almost 15% of the active population in the decade of 2000s.

At the same time, agro-extractivism encompasses a set of crops associated with certain income-generating circuits, but also with class dynamics with internal political implications. In this sense, the economic, social, political and institutional influences of agro-extractivism as well as its medium- and long-term associated dynamics should not be underestimated (Fenton, 2020; Larrea *et al.*, 1987). Even though agro-extractivism did not increase significantly, it successfully resisted very unfavourable conjunctures. This illustrates the difficulty of a “soft” transition from a tropical export-oriented agriculture to another model centred on the idea of food sovereignty. In this context, any transition to a more socially equal and environmentally friendly agrarian model should be understood as the result of particularly turbulent processes, full of micro-conflicts with strong socio-political implications. In any case, the Ecuadorian experience could be relevant for the analysis of food relations and its effective spaces of possibility in the context of existing neoliberalism (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; McMichael, 2009a).

44. Between 1964 and 2007, the Ecuadorian population grew from 5.1 to 14.25 million inhabitants (World Bank).

45. Although there was a decline in the share of agriculture in total employment over the period analysed, this indicator remained particularly high in 2007 (28.5%), well above that of some neighbouring countries such as Colombia (18.4%) and Venezuela (8.8%). However, agricultural employment levels in Ecuador are similar to those observed in Peru and Bolivia (World Bank).

46. Figure 5 clearly illustrates this fact.

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