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Introduction to Indio Guayas and the Study

This chapter sets the scene for this thirty-year story by introducing the households and families in Indio Guayas that are the main social actors, summarizing the changes they have experienced over the thirty-year period. It highlights how the similarity between their socioeconomic characteristics and economic circumstances in 1978 enabled them to be considered what scientists term a natural experiment. By 2004 differentiation was more visible between those that had made it out of poverty and those who had not. The causes and consequences of this change are the main theme this book seeks to address.

Marta and Her Neighbors in Indio Guayas

In 1978 Marta, a twenty-six-year-old dressmaker; her husband, Jesus, a tailor aged thirty-nine; and their two young daughters, Adriana and Ana Maria, bought a ten-by-thirty-meter plot of waterlogged mangrove swamp from a professional squatter in Cisne Dos, one of a number of neighborhoods (*barrios*) in the parish (*parroquia*) of Febres Cordero. This particular neighborhood, soon to be named Indio Guayas after its community committee, is an eleven-block area (*manzana*) located on the southwest edge of the city, about seven kilometers from the central business district. Indio Guayas, at the far end of the parish, is bounded by two wide “artery” roads, the *Calle* (street) 25 and Calle 26, and stretches from

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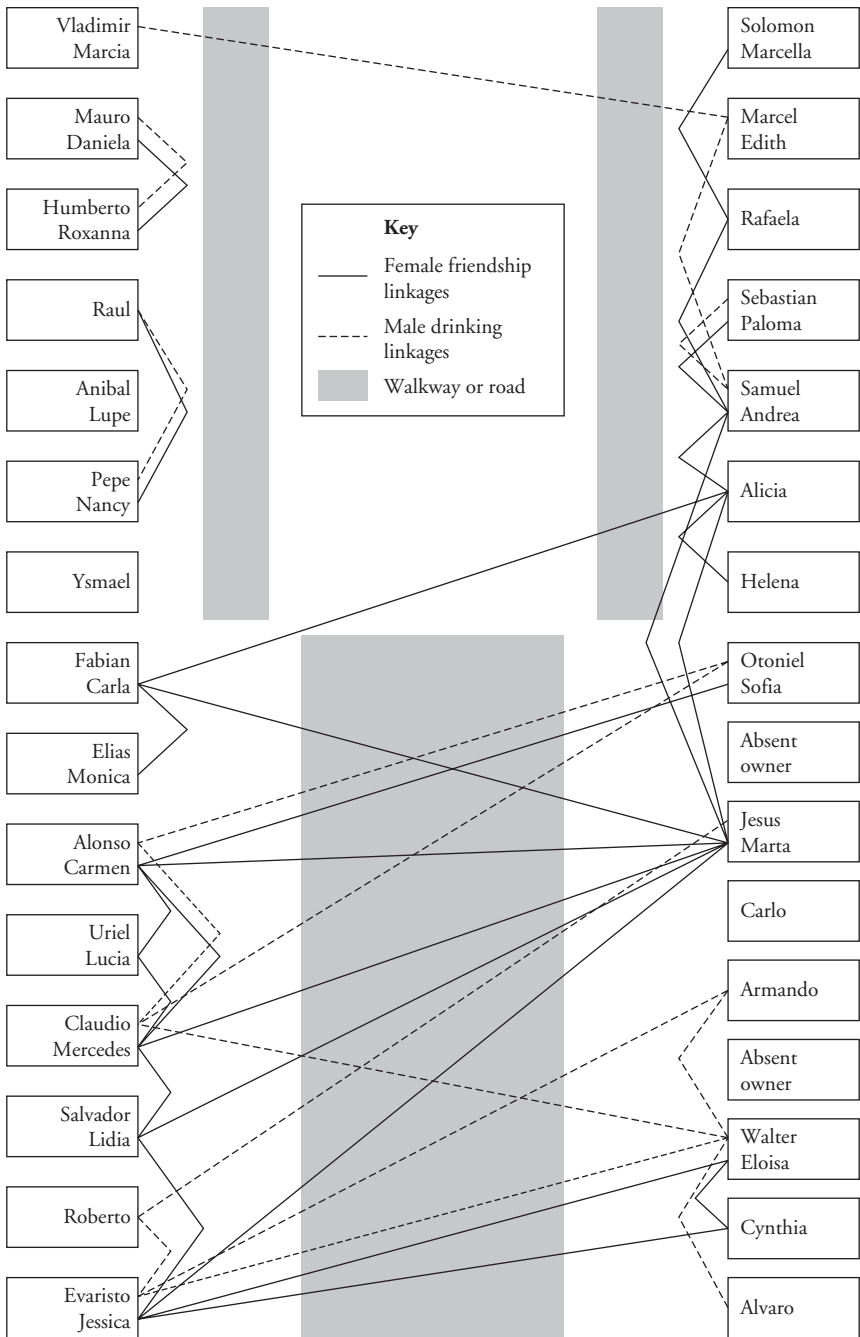
Calle F to Calle Ñ, and runs up to one of the estuaries (*estero*) of the River Guayas. Ecuador's largest city, chief port, and industrial center, Guayaquil is located on low-lying land 160 kilometers from the Pacific Ocean where two rivers converge. In 1978 the city had a population of 600,000, with the poor living in inner-city slums, known as *tugurios*, or in squatter settlements, called the *suburbios*, on tidal swampland.

Anxious to escape the high rents in the city center, Marta and her family left the relative comfort of a shared multifamily house for the *suburbios*, which housed a third of the city's population. In the early 1970s, when she, along with the first homeowners, arrived in the area, it was a mangrove swamp, which professional squatters sold off as ten-by-thirty-meter plots (*solars*). Her family quickly erected a very basic bamboo and wood housing structure above the water, and began the challenge of living a life lacking not only permanent dry land but also all basic services such as electricity, running water, and plumbing, as well as social services such as health care and education.

Settling around them on the same "street," the Calle K, were other young families equally eager to take advantage of the possibility of invading or buying cheap plots from land speculators. Directly across the perilous wooden walkway was Mercedes with her husband, Claudio, another tailor as well as an informal dental technician, and their two young children. To the left of Mercedes lived Carmen, a laundrywoman, and Alonso, a skilled builder, and their three daughters. Lidia and Salvador and their four children lived on the other side. Among others settling nearby was Alicia, also a washerwoman, a thirty-six-year-old single mother with seven children who lived four doors down from Marta. A few doors away in the other direction from Marta were two brothers, both tailors. Walter lived with his wife, Eloisa, and two sons, and two doors down was the bachelor household of Alvaro, who would later marry Yasmin and have three children. Among other neighbors forming this close-knit community were Diego and Andrea Ortega (whose son Mateo would later go to Barcelona).

When these families first arrived, there were no roads; houses were connected by hazardous wood and bamboo catwalks (*puentes*). This isolation meant that the women were forced to rely on previously unknown neighbors; they quickly developed complex social networks for mutual aid while the men, in turn, formed close drinking relationships.¹ Many of these connections were formalized through a godparent relationship (*compadrasco*). Figure 1-1 shows women's and men's social networks in the Calle K in 1978. These stopped halfway down the street, reflecting the fact that "communal" catwalks were only constructed by half the group of neighbors, preempting contact with those living further down the street. There the networks were not as dense; among these

Figure 1-1. Gender-Based Reciprocity Networks in the Calle K, Indio Guayas, 1978



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less cohesive neighbors there were a multitude of small individual catwalks rather than one collective catwalk.

The neighbors quickly formed a highly cohesive self-help committee that covered the eleven-block area, and they soon elected Marta president. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as described in chapters 4 and 5, the committee, with broad support from the community, lobbied government authorities and political parties as well as international agencies to acquire basic physical and social infrastructure.

Indio Guayas as a “Natural Experiment”

When they first settled in Indio Guayas, these neighboring households were surprisingly similar, not only in their living conditions but also in their ages, life cycle, household structure, and professions, despite minor differences in terms of family size and marital status. Many of the men were craftsmen such as tailors or carpenters, while the women were domestic servants, washerwomen, or dress-makers. Both men and women were also involved in informal sector retail selling. Indio Guayas was a homogeneous community in nearly all respects, including initial household endowments as well as the external political and economic context in which they lived.

The nearly identical household circumstances of this young population of settlers, struggling to make their way in the city and many just starting families, provided the conditions for a “natural experiment.”² In 1978 more than 80 percent of households were below the income poverty line, two-thirds of households were nuclear families, both women and men had a mean age of thirty years, the average household size was nearly six, the average age of children was seven years, and the average number of working members per household was one and a half. The adults had little education and few assets other than the same amount of land provided by the municipality. This unique set of circumstances allows one to pose compelling questions: What has happened over time? Have they all succeeded in getting out of poverty, and if not, why not?

Indio Guayas Thirty Years Later

Thirty years later, Indio Guayas was a stable urban settlement. The level of infrastructure provision was attained through a remarkable process of community contestation in which Marta’s leadership, along with the support of neighbors such as Lourdes, Claudio, and Alicia, was critical for success. Families no longer lived in bamboo houses but rather in cement block houses. They were no longer connected by dangerous walkways but instead lived on paved roads built on solid land, and the neighborhood had physical infrastructure such as running

water, lighting, and sewerage. Development was not limited to utilities but also included social infrastructure such as schools and clinics. The city's rapid spatial expansion during this period meant that Indio Guayas was no longer on the periphery. By 2004 many of the children of the original settlers had also formed families of their own and were living on their parents' plots within the community, elsewhere in Indio Guayas, or in other parts of Guayaquil, or had migrated abroad, particularly to Barcelona.

After this lengthy time period, Indio Guayas emerged as a relative success story in terms of income poverty reduction. By 2004 fewer than one in three was poor, and all residents lived in permanent settlements with land titles and physical and social infrastructure. Nevertheless, there had been winners and losers in terms of income poverty. Households had moved in different directions. Some, such as Marta and Jesus, Carmen and Alonso, and Alvaro and Yasmin, had moved steadily upward and gotten out of income poverty.³ Some, such as Claudio and Mercedes, and Walter and Eloisa, had moved upward and then downward, while others, such as Lidia and Salvador, and Alicia, remained stuck in income poverty.

An examination of assets, however, reveals a more complex story than the measurement of purely income-based poverty levels. For instance, in the 1970s the trust and collaboration that formed the social relations in the community (identified as its social capital) were essential for the acquisition of social and physical infrastructure by all households.⁴ From 1985 to 1995, welfare benefits and child care based on community services using women's voluntary labor were provided first through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and then through Plan International. Thus community social capital continued to be important. However, in the following decade, as a consequence of both the acquisition of such infrastructure and the demise of the community welfare support programs, the importance of the community organization declined.

Yet it was social capital that initially helped households to accumulate the physical capital required for home construction, acquiring land titles, and filling in their plots with earth. Over time, as households incrementally upgraded their houses and replaced bamboo walls with cement blocks and earth, or replaced wooden floors with cement, the value of this physical asset increased. From 1978 to 1992, housing, the first critical asset that households sought to accumulate, grew fastest. During the 1992–2004 period, once housing was established, parents made trade-offs between their children's human capital or their own consumption, either investing in their children's education as a longer-term strategy for poverty reduction or spending on "luxury" consumer durables including DVDs, TVs, and occasionally even computers. Over time, households

became more differentiated not only in terms of poverty levels but also in terms of asset ownership, with interesting patterns of income mobility and asset accumulation and an associated relationship between them.

By 2004, for instance, while Alicia was still income poor, she was asset rich in terms of human capital. Having put most of her nine children through secondary school, her family was finally upgrading the house and acquiring consumer durables. On Mother's Day in 2005, her children joined together to buy her a washing machine. One of her daughters, Reina, commented, "Our mother spent thirty years as a washerwoman so as to support us. Surely this is the best way we can repay her." In contrast, Lidia was both income and asset poor, and her wayward husband was unemployed. They relied on small intermittent financial support from her children (none of whom finished high school) and unpredictable remittances from one daughter, with much of the money spent on alcohol.

Turning to the next generation, we find that by 2004 adult sons and daughters were better educated but also had greater expectations and aspirations to match. They faced new and increasingly daunting challenges in a globalized context where few good employment opportunities would present themselves. Nearly half still live on the family plot and benefit from the assets accumulated by their parents. Household social capital had increased over time, particularly among poorer households. Low wages, the high expenditure on human capital (health and education) associated with privatization of social infrastructure, and increasing demand for conspicuous consumption left households needing more income earners than before.

Others of the next generation, such as the sons and daughters of Lidia and Salvador, had left to acquire homes of their own, repeating their parents' experience but this time squatting on the hills that form the city's new periphery. Despite their better education, they had been insufficiently economically mobile to make it to the gated communities (*cuidadelos*) where the new middle class lived. A third group had migrated abroad. These included Marta's nephew, Gonzalo, and Diego and Andrea Ortega's son, Mateo, both of whom had gone to live in Barcelona, where the employment opportunities, labor rights, and access to financial capital such as mortgages all contributed to far more rapid asset accumulation than that of their peers in Guayaquil. In Barcelona there were greater opportunities as well as higher levels of socioeconomic mobility.

Despite the upward economic mobility of her family, Marta still identified herself as poor. This highlights the limitations of both income poverty and asset measurement, and raises the question: Whose perception of poverty are we, or should we be, talking about? Ultimately, poverty is a relational concept, not an absolute level. Marta's situation must be contextualized within the broader eco-

conomic, political, and social structure of Guayaquil, which in many ways has remained constant over the past thirty years. Thus, while Marta knew she was not as poor as many of her neighbors, her daughters nevertheless lacked employment commensurate with their educational level. Although Ana Maria had a university degree in industrial psychology, she had become an underpaid administrative secretary at the local state secondary school in Indio Guayas, while Marta's other daughter, Adriana, scraped by selling clothes and cosmetics informally in the local neighborhood in between fixed-term contract jobs with the local government.

For the next generation, merely escaping poverty may not be sufficient since inequality and exclusion represent powerful development challenges in their own right. In Indio Guayas increasing alienation, associated with higher educational levels and a lack of decent wage employment due to the stagnant Guayaquil economy and inflexible broader social and political structures, has exacerbated perceptions of exclusion for the next generation. In some cases this has resulted in a dramatic rise in violent robbery, theft, and drug dealing, with insecurity and growing fear affecting all households.

The story of the pioneers who created Indio Guayas tells us that "getting out of poverty" is closely linked to the accumulation of different assets, with successful accumulation strategies varying according to circumstances. However, while the history of asset accumulation illustrates individual, household, and community "pathways out of poverty," ultimately the fundamental question remains as to how well rising expectations can be met without accompanying changes in the broader economic and political context. In this instance, the state, despite an oil boom economy, has fundamentally failed to generate adequate economic opportunities for the majority of the better-educated next generation.

The National and City-Level Context of Indio Guayas

Long-term changes in income poverty and assets need to be examined in terms of internal life cycle factors such as changes in household headship, age, and number of children. However, these considerations cannot be divorced from the external structural macroeconomic and political factors operating during different phases of Ecuador's history as well as the stages in Guayaquil's spatial development. These factors provided the broader context within which poverty reduction and asset accumulation occurred. (See time line summary in appendix B, figure B-1.)

The geography of Guayaquil is an important starting point. Guayaquil is Ecuador's largest city, chief port, and major center of trade and industry. Along with Quito, the highland capital, Guayaquil is one of the country's

most important cities. This lowland coastal town was founded by the Spanish in 1537, some 160 kilometers upstream from the Pacific Ocean at the confluence of the Daule and Barboyo Rivers. Guayaquil's growth stemmed from its optimal location for receiving tropical produce, transported from the hinterland by river craft, for transfer to seagoing vessels for export. Consequently, the city's development was closely linked to Ecuador's primary, export-oriented economy, making the city dependent on shifts in the world market structure (MacIntosh 1972).

Before the dramatic 1970s oil boom, Ecuador was primarily an agricultural exporter with most of its wealth and power base on the coast. Late nineteenth-century industrialization and associated urbanization resulted from the coastal cultivation and export of cacao. By 1920 this accounted for more than 70 percent of the country's exports. The linked influx of wealth created a market for industrial products in Guayaquil, and early industrialization included the manufacture or processing of basic commodities, such as starch products, milk, rice, beverages, and clothing. The Ecuadorian banana boom began in 1933. Facing little competition, Ecuador was soon the primary banana producer worldwide. Between 1945 and 1956, its banana exports constituted a fifth of the global market (Gerlach 2003, p. 30). The urban population increased dramatically as a result of the economic prosperity, which again was strongest on the coast; between 1942 and 1962, the coastal population doubled, and Guayaquil's 5.8 percent a year growth throughout the 1950s transformed it into the economic hub of Ecuador.

The discovery of oil in the interior in the 1970s marked a crucial turning point for Ecuador. Oil revenue funded industrialization and stimulated economic development just as the banana boom was winding down. One major consequence was a shift of both economic and political power from Guayaquil and its coastal merchant class to Quito, where the central government was located. This allowed Quito more overt control over the economy and society, as well as strengthened the military at the expense of the traditional oligarchy (Gerlach 2003, pp. 35–36).

Turning to the more recent past, we can loosely divide the last three decades during which this research was undertaken into three periods, each of which was distinguished by different macroeconomic development models, national political conditions, and changes in policy approaches by government institutions, donors, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). (See appendix B for a detailed description of the broader context.)

Guayaquil in 1978: Optimism in a Buoyant, Expanding Economy

At the time of the first fieldwork in 1978, Guayaquil was experiencing rapid economic and industrial growth. Associated with this were increasing in-migration,

a high level of urbanization, and the expansion of low-income settlements on the city's periphery (Santos Alvite 1989). In 1978 the city had a population of around 1 million, with 30 percent of its annual growth produced by immigration, mainly mixed-race people (*mestizos*) from the surrounding littoral departments but also a limited number of indigenous people (*serranos*) from the highlands. During the 1970s Ecuador also emerged from military rule and experienced a political democratization process that included the establishment of new democratic parties such as Izquierda Democrática (Democratic Left). The democratization process prompted municipal reforms that gave mangrove land to the poor in Guayaquil and provided the opportunity for community-level committees to lobby and contest the local municipality to acquire physical infrastructure.

1978–92: Economic Stagnation from Structural Adjustment and Stabilization Policies

The second period from 1978 to 1992, corresponding to the years between the first and second panel data, was marked by macroeconomic structural adjustment policies, a decline in state social sector provisions, and the increasing presence of international development agencies. During nearly a decade and a half, repeated political change accompanied the inability of successive governments to adequately address mounting economic crises. Guayaquil's economic growth was fundamentally affected by the impact of both international oil price changes and internal natural disasters. The 1970s policy of low taxes also exacerbated the effect of the end of the oil boom. While oil revenue was dwindling, voters had become accustomed to artificially cheap public services (such as gas and electricity) subsidized by the government and to paying lower taxes. As foreign currency dried up in the 1980s and domestic demand also fell, the predictable result was heavy inflation and a new economic crisis. Industrial and basic commodity production declined after 1982.⁵ With impending elections, the Febres Cordero government went on a spending spree and further reduced social services that it was unable to fund. Ultimately, the fallout from its misguided macroeconomic policies prompted the Ecuadorian government to commit to a structural adjustment program designed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

1993–2004: Recovery from Late 1990s Dollarization Crisis and Dramatic Out-Migration

The third and most recent period, from 1992 to 2004, was one of globalization and dollarization, characterized by financial crisis, increased involvement of the

private sector in providing social services such as health and education, and rapid expansion of international migration as an alternative safety net for many households. This final period was again one of economic turmoil during which political instability increased and the country failed to make good on the economic reforms implemented in the 1980s. In the first part of the 1990s, successive governments pursued strategies to promote and augment economic growth. They eliminated many subsidies favoring the rich, such as those for gasoline, while maintaining those that helped the poor, such as those for electricity and cooking gas. Dollarization brought hyperinflation to a halt, though not immediately (Solimano 2002). Perhaps more important, confidence in Ecuador's banking system was restored.

My Home Away from Home in Indio Guayas

Just as Indio Guayas and the broader context in which it is situated have had a complex history over the past thirty years, so too has my involvement with the community. In most anthropological studies, this description is usually relegated to a methodological appendix or footnote; yet the manner in which researchers become involved in communities, the methodologies they use, and the ways in which they retain long-term relationships with community members all fundamentally influence the research process. They are basic to understanding a researcher's identity as well as the agency of the different members of the community that inform the study. For this reason, this section describes in some detail my relationship with the community.

Over the past thirty years I have spent varying lengths of time on ten different occasions in Indio Guayas. I first lived there between September 1978 and April 1979 with my then husband, Brian Moser, and my two sons, Titus and Nathaniel, who at that time were aged eight and six, respectively. Our initial objective was to make a TV documentary film for Granada Television, a U.K. independent television company. Community leader Señora Marta Perez provided our entry point into the community by quickly grasping our commitment to make a film that would provide the inhabitants of a third world slum community with the opportunity to describe their daily lives. It would document their resourcefulness and courage in overcoming difficult and dangerous living conditions as well as their ingenuity in bettering their lives by collectively mobilizing to challenge Hanne Muse, the city's mayor, to provide running water for the community. The film, entitled *People of the Barrio*, was shown on British television in 1981 and challenged the perceptions of sensational misery in slum films of the time, such as Louis Malle's *Calcutta*.⁶ Equally, it debunked the

prevalent stereotype of third world urban slum dwellers as being caught in a “culture of poverty”—with an autonomous dynamism and self-perpetuating transmission mechanisms (Lewis 1961, 1966) and being marginalized by wider structural constraints, not only spatially but also politically, economically, and socially (Perlman 1976; Roberts 1978; Quijano 1974).⁷

A U.K. newspaper article written to promote the film reflected popular perception when it described our experience as follows:

[Caroline and Brian’s] idea was to move away from the prevalent shock-horror approach to the portrayal of Third World Slums, the filming of undernourished inhabitants in conditions so humiliating that they seemed less human beings than cyphers at a peep show. What better way than to become slum dwellers themselves, to experience at first hand the way people managed to cope with extreme poverty? . . . It was living next door to people rather than looking at them from outside and above that helped the Mosers to realize that slums were “neither hotbeds of revolution or hell-holes of despair.”⁸

To make the film, we accepted the invitation of Marta to build our own four-by-eight-meter bamboo house on part of her plot.⁹ As a family we were widely welcomed since it was unheard of for foreigners to enter allegedly dangerous communities such as Indio Guayas, let alone live there; put our children in the local school with sixty children in a class; and learn to live without any basic services.¹⁰ My identity as a wife and mother had significant implications in terms of my access to different community members. It meant I made very close friendships with the women, who taught me to cook using kerosene, lent me water when my supply ran out, and showed me how to deal with potentially rabid dog bites by applying soap and water. This experience provided the roots of friendships that have continued to this day.

As a wife I was not taken seriously by the men, who, with a few marked exceptions (such as local tailors, whose petty commodity production I spent time studying), treated me with the same irreverence they tended to show their partners or wives. This would set a pattern that has persisted. Although I returned in 1981 as a divorced woman, this did not change men’s attitudes toward me. The rules of the game were established, only to be broken by one or two audacious men who now saw the potential that I might be sexually available and flirted subtly with me, particularly at community parties. When Peter Sollis, my new partner and then husband, first appeared in Indio Guayas, it took time for him to be accepted. He was subject to considerable scrutiny and comparison with Don Brian, who along with one of my sons has continued to remain in contact

with the community. While living there in 1986 and 1992, Peter formed friendships with men in the community, particularly Jesus, Claudio, and Alvaro. In this way he, too, became accepted as part of this extended English family.¹¹

Despite my friendship with the women on Calle K, this is not a book about the lives of women but about the lives of families and households. Nevertheless, because of my gendered identity, the voices documented in this study are primarily those of women—in particular, the women already mentioned earlier in this chapter, namely, Marta, Mercedes, Alicia, Carmen, and Lidia, along with their respective families. All close neighbors, they are the central protagonists of this story and provided much of the detailed narrative.¹² However, many other social actors contributed important insights to my understanding of Indio Guayas. My gender stereotype had less significance when I talked with second-generation young men, not only in Guayaquil but also in Barcelona, and was offset by their affectionate memories of my now adult sons. In contrast, because I knew their mothers well, some of the daughters—while polite—were more guarded in expressing opinions.

My academic training included a graduate diploma from the University of Manchester, where I studied in a unique department that had joined together the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. My commitment to combining qualitative anthropological research with quantitative surveys began then, and was first implemented in a study of market sellers in Bogotá, Colombia (Moser 1976). Thus, from my first visit to Indio Guayas, I adopted what more recently has become known as a “mixed method” approach (Kanbur 2003). In my case this meant combining anthropological techniques—such as participant observation and interviews with “key informants”—with three quantitative sociological household surveys undertaken in 1978, 1992, and 2004. The surveys provided the important quantitative panel data set. From 2004 onward I also used participatory urban appraisal (PUA) techniques (see Moser and McIlwaine 1999). In Barcelona a sample survey was complemented by PUA and taped interviews. Finally, in writing this book, I have incorporated entries from diaries and field notes, extracts from the extensive transcripts associated with the film, and other interviews undertaken during the 1978–2005 period. (See appendix A for details of the fieldwork methodology.)

Influence of the Indio Guayas Study

Over the past thirty years, learning about the opportunities and constraints confronting community members—both in terms of changes in their life cycles and in the broader context in which they lived—has inductively informed my own

research agenda as well as influenced my contribution to wider development debates. In turn, changes in focus and emphasis along the way also have been influenced by broader academic debates and my own professional development.

In the 1970s informal sector employment (Moser 1978, 1981), housing, and land (Moser 1982) were important in the analysis of the Indio Guayas research, not only because this was the early period of invasion and settlement consolidation in the community but also because they reflected my own academic work as a young lecturer in an academic urban planning department (the Development Planning Unit, University College London). By the early 1980s, I had become involved both intellectually and politically in the early gender and development debates, developing the concept of gender planning (Moser 1989b, 1993). When I next undertook fieldwork in 1982, community leader Marta, along with her committee, was deeply involved in complex negotiations with the newly formed Izquierda Democrática political party to exchange votes for infrastructure works. Given my interests, I focused particularly on changing gender roles and social relations in community management and politics (Moser 1987).

While I was a lecturer in social policy in developing countries at the London School of Economics in 1988, a study undertaken collaboratively with Peter provided the first opportunity to understand the social and economic impact of macroeconomic structural reform programs on households, particularly on women (Moser 1992). As a consequence of this pathbreaking research, I was offered the opportunity to undertake a further, more comprehensive study and to engage with policymakers. In 1990, therefore, I joined the World Bank and broadened the research to include community studies in three other cities as well as Indio Guayas. One unexpected research finding was increased levels of both social and economic violence and associated levels of fear and insecurity. These results from Indio Guayas informed a decade of subsequent research on urban violence in other contexts (Moser and Holland 1997; Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Moser and Winton 2002). Returning once again to Indio Guayas in 2004, I was confronted by the new phenomenon of international migration and its impact on the community, which has provided yet again a new focus for my research.

It is only since 2007, with the support of a Ford Foundation grant, that I have had the opportunity to pull together all the pieces of the puzzle, to move from a sequence of “snapshots” of reality at different points in time to examining the thirty-year period in its entirety. This has posed challenges in terms of the analytical framework for this final study. Although in each previous stage research results were analyzed within an ongoing development debate (as

reflected in the publications cited above), this is not a book about development debates. For this reason I have chosen not to undertake a detailed analysis of the data—which range over a quarter of a century—in terms of the specific development debates existing at the time they were collected.¹³ Rather, since poverty and assets, and the associated policy issue of poverty reduction, have been the overriding theme throughout my association with the Indio Guayas community, this book uses as its underlying theoretical framework the changing poverty debate over the past two decades, incorporating as appropriate the empirical results from different stages.

Narrative Econometrics: A “Qual-Quant” Methodology

As a small study that combines qualitative, participatory, and quantitative methodological approaches, the research presented here has been challenged by the criticism that it is neither statistically robust nor representative. However, justifying complementarities between quantitative and qualitative data is by no means a new problem.¹⁴ For instance, some forty years ago, pioneering “applied” social anthropologist Max Gluckman (1968) and sociologist Clyde Mitchell (1968) introduced the concept of “apt illustration.” Closely linked to “situational analysis,” it was an important anthropological research tool used in two definitive studies to justify to colonial administrators the importance of qualitative research in explaining the complex political, economic, and social phenomena associated with rapid rural-urban migration in Southern Africa.

Thirty years later, in the middle phase of the Guayaquil research, I also faced similar problems when as a World Bank staff member, I undertook a study on the “social impact” of structural adjustment reforms in four poor urban communities in four different regions of the world. These included not only Guayaquil, Ecuador, but also Lusaka, Zambia; Budapest, Hungary; and Metro Manila, the Philippines (Moser 1996, 1997, 1998). To address the issue of robustness and representativeness, the four-city project implemented three identical research tools in all four communities, with built-in monitoring mechanisms to cross-check consistency in implementation (Moser, Gatehouse, and Garcia 1996; Moser 2003).¹⁵ This ensured uniformity both in the fieldwork methodology and in the data analysis across all communities. The results highlighted similarities and differences in individual-, household-, and community-level vulnerability in the context of economic crisis in four communities in very diverse countries, and identified the manner in which a household’s management of its complex asset portfolio influenced its capacity to cope (Moser 1998).¹⁶

At the time, the effects of adjustment policy were highly contested: while the World Bank maintained the essential macroeconomic necessity of such measures, the NGO community lobbied against them, arguing that they exacerbated rather than alleviated poverty (Ribe and others 1990; Development GAP 1993). In hindsight, it was somewhat dangerous territory for an anthropologist since even economists themselves were having methodological problems with the causality and associated quantitative measurements of the social impact of macroeconomic adjustment measures (World Bank 1995b). Nevertheless, my research results were summarily dismissed by many, particularly economists, on the grounds that they were neither representative at the national level nor robust in terms of cross-country comparisons. At best it was concluded that they provided interesting case study or “anecdotal” information on community and household coping strategies in crisis situations.¹⁷

While the results from “microstudies” such as this were never designed to be representative at the national level, they nonetheless provided important data on the complexity of daily life in poor communities that elude quantitative national level household surveys. However, in seeking to actually measure changing poverty levels among households in Indio Guayas, rather than anthropologically ascribing to them the status of a low-income community, I unwittingly entered into the “hegemonic discourse on poverty” where the “constitution of poverty as a research agenda (has become) predetermined by the policy agenda of the international development institutions and the World Bank in particular” (Green 2006). Or, as Escobar has commented, poverty is “an entity brought into being through the institutions established to describe, quantify and locate it” (1995, pp. 21–22).

In designing the research methodology for the final phase of this thirty-year study, it might have been more straightforward to have continued as before. Perhaps perversely, I have chosen to build on earlier cross-disciplinary combined methodologies, now further legitimized by Ravi Kanbur’s conceptualization of the “qual-quant” divide (Kanbur 2003), and to push the envelope even further through the elaboration of narrative econometrics.¹⁸ Andrew Felton, an economist, has worked with me not only to combine qualitative and quantitative research results but also to introduce the econometric measurement of the quantitative data. Narrative econometrics seeks to combine the econometric measurements of change in asset levels with in-depth anthropological narratives that identify the social relations within households and communities that influence well-being, thereby contributing to the identification of the associated causality underpinning economic mobility. By using this approach, I seek to bridge the

divide in current debates about the limitations of measurement-based poverty analysis that disregard context and therefore “cannot address the dynamic, structural and relational factors that give rise to poverty” (Harriss 2007a; Green and Hulme 2005).

Have I succeeded in bridging this divide? This is the challenge addressed in the following chapters, first by providing the econometric results, and then by combining them with the narratives that come from the perceptions and analyses of community members in Indio Guayas. Does this ultimately provide different answers from static snapshots? The following chapters will tell.