Summary of the doctoral proposal
"Powerful and Powerless: Senses of justice regarding conflicts treatment in community-based management".

Claim of significance.

During my initial years working with mangrove communities, I was deeply moved by the conflicts they experience with other small-scale gatherers and fishermen. When delving into the reasons that have led to this situation, I developed my understanding by acknowledging that these conflicts are a consequence of (i) the shrimp expansion between 1970-2000 and (ii) the illegal extraction of the fishing industry. This is why my research is firmly framed within political ecology, which I describe as the study of the "*complex relations between Nature and Society through careful analysis of social forms of access and control over resources*" (Watts & Peet, 2004, p. 4).

Using case studies of two coastal communities of the Gulf of Guayaquil in Ecuador, Puerto Roma and Isla Costa Rica, I study the contemporary access conflicts between small-scale gatherers and fishermen of different rural and urban areas. In this narrative, I aim to document how Ecuador's coastal history is woven through the ongoing struggle between industrial extractivism and artisanal fisheries, and the long-term impact of the first one over the lives of local fishermen.

In my ethnographic work, I had the privilege of engaging with the communities in this discussion and asking them about their reflections on the fairness or unfairness of their actions towards other small-scale fishermen during these conflicts. Other methods used were 59 interviews, 4 workshops with local associations, 1 workshop with women, and 3 surveys in each locality.

As the first study that contributes to deepening our understanding of the sense of justice of different community groups (women, men, youth, and adults) to solve conflicts of access, this research will contribute to scholars and policymakers to reflect on the consequences of nature's appropriation by the industry and the ongoing tension between conservation of nature, social inclusion, and sustainability. This research also serves as a case study with broader implications for coastal regions dealing with similar challenges worldwide.

Context.

During the shrimp expansion between 1984 and 1999 Ecuador lost 35,601 hectares of mangrove (CLIRSEN, 2007).Thanks to the struggle of the ancestral peoples, in 2000 the "Agreements for the Sustainable Use and Custody of Mangrove"[1] (MESUCA) were approved and through them, the remaining mangrove was given in concessions to organizations of artisanal fishermen and crab and cockle collectors. Since then, they have been recognized as custodians of delimited mangrove areas; they must report illegal logging and have exclusive access for the collection of mangrove resources. This exclusion has achieved resource sustainability, but is emerging as a mechanism that prevents other artisanal collectors -for example, from urban areas- from accessing the areas to achieve their sustenance. Now there are around 50 MESUCAs in Ecuador, and at the worldwide

[1] Its current name is "Mangrove Ecosystem Sustainable Use and Custody Agreements" since the approval of the new Organic Environmental Code in 2022.

level 16 other countries have applied similar forms of community mangrove management (Datta et al., 2012), which adds relevance to this research.

Industrial fishing extraction that illegally invades the artisanal fishing zone generates scarcity on the coasts, causing fishermen from the affected communities to displace to seek fishing in other communities' waters. This triggers access conflicts among them.

Conflicts in mangrove management: old and latent conflicts.
The crab/cockle gatherers´ associations have the *de jure* power granted to them by the MESUCAs to exclude users from other areas. On the other hand, the latter also have access strategies (they enter when they are not seen -at night-, or use traps or other harmful fishing gear, of “quick implementation”) because they need access to the areas for their survival. I study how these entry conflicts are resolved.

The MESUCAs, through the exclusion of human groups in mangrove hectares, function as a tool for ecological conservation, but at the same time as a tool for socioeconomic exclusion of other human groups. This research proposes illuminate the discussion of whether it is possible, in the current circumstances, to have a more inclusive -and at the same time- a sustainable mangrove. My study positions this dilemma by contextualizing that the mangrove ecosystem has suffered a considerable reduction over time, as a result of the shrimp expansion that dispossessed local people of their land, and there is no more mangrove to be concessioned. In this way, the industry, through "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2012), has contributed to the existence of contemporary conflicts among mangrove resource harvesters, who are generally vulnerable, whether from rural or urban sectors.

Additionally, my research demonstrates that other latent conflicts exist. Through interviews during my fieldwork, it became evident that the communities considered (as of June 2023) that conflicts with shrimp farmers had been reduced compared to previous decades. However, the shrimp farmers have requested the ownership of the land where their shrimp ponds are located, and the government tried to support this with the recent Executive Decree 754. This was seen as an open door to the privatization of the mangrove. Now, the Constitutional Court had denied the Decree. Still, in the face of the newly elected political party (October 2023), it is important to remember that the fights against dispossession are a latent force in Latin America (Bastos & Martínez, 2023).

Conflicts in the management of artisanal fisheries: fishermen displaced by industrial extraction.
Tensions in the Gulf are also caused by the illegal presence of the fishing industry in the 8 nautical miles that should, according to Art. 104 of the Fishing Law (Ley Orgánica Para El Desarrollo de La Acuicultura y Pesca, 2020), be used only for artisanal fishing. In certain ports in southern Ecuador, the industrial fleet is so numerous that it has managed to extract resources to such an extent that artisanal fishermen no longer find the 8 miles productive.

The dynamics that are woven around this situation are one of "displacement". While the industrial fleet extracts fish in coastal areas, the artisanal fishermen in these areas find little to

fish and move to other communities. This generates conflicts between artisanal fishermen over access to the few fish that remain.

These conflicts are dealt with through the use of weapons. When the fishermen find a "mancha" (shoal) they all cast their nets, but some shoot into the air as a message so that others do not approach and steal their fish. The other way of dealing with the conflict is that when the nets get tangled, some use knives to cut them and take the fish. This is reflected in loss of fishing materials, which has an important cost for the artisanal fishermen.

Justice according to community groups.

In the final phase of my fieldwork, I collected opinions from different community groups (women, men, youth, adults) about the ways their communities deal with conflicts with other harvesters and artisanal fishermen. Analyzing this information will reveal the nuances in the thinking of community groups. For example, some community voices consider that foreign crab/cockle collectors have families and should have the option to benefit from the mangrove resources and provide a livelihood for their children. And, when faced with the use of weapons, some consider these to be legitimate forms of defense.

Advancement of the doctoral proposal.

To study the conflicts faced by the localities, I presented my proposal to the communities of Puerto Roma (northern of the Gulf of Guayaquil) and Isla Costa Rica (southern), with whom I have had a working and research relationship for more than four years, and to whom I hope to contribute. Additionally, for a better understanding of the access conflicts in the Gulf, I made visits and held conversations with fishermen from Puerto Libertad, Cerrito de los Morreños, Cristo Rey, Nuevo Porvenir and Puerto Bolivar (Figure 1), all of them coastal communities settled in mangrove swamps. The fieldwork phase lasted nine months (October 2022 - June 2023) and I am now in the analysis and writing phase. I am a junior researcher at the ZEF-Center of Development Research of University of Bonn with an EPOS-DAAD scholarship funded by the German Academic Exchange Service.

Conclusion.

This work contributes to the understanding of the political ecology of the Gulf of Guayaquil, recognizing the powers and interests that operate in the territory. It also contributes to the study of community dynamics from the perspective of how different community groups appreciate the management of their territory and how fair they believe are the ways in which each community deals with conflicts with other fishermen and artisanal harvesters.

References.

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Map of the geographic location.

Figure 1