

Ethnicity, Gender, and Oil

Comparative Dynamics in the Ecuadorian Amazon

by

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During the past decade, Ecuador's Alianza PAÍS socialist government, primarily under the leadership of Rafael Correa, was committed to moving toward a post-neoliberal economy and implementing a "New Amazon" free of poverty, with expanded infrastructure and services, as part of the redistribution of oil revenues. However, in sites of state development projects, gender hierarchies and territorial dispossession in fact became more acute. Analysis of two place-based indigenous political ecologies—one in the central Amazon, where the state licensed new oil blocks in Sapara territory to a Chinese company in 2016, and the other in the Kichwa community of Playas de Cuyabeno in the northern Amazon, where the state company PetroAmazonas has operated since the 1970s—shows how women have reconfigured their ethnic and gender identities in relation to oil companies and the state in the context of rising and falling oil prices and in doing so reinforced or challenged male leaders' positions in the internal structures of their communities and organizations.

Durante la última década, el gobierno socialista de Alianza PAÍS de Ecuador, principalmente bajo el liderazgo de Rafael Correa, se comprometió a avanzar hacia una economía posneoliberal e implementar una "Nueva Amazonía" libre de pobreza, con infraestructura y servicios ampliados, como parte de la redistribución de los ingresos petroleros. Sin embargo, en los sitios de proyectos estatales de desarrollo, las jerarquías de género y el despojo territorial de hecho se hicieron más agudos. Análisis de dos ecologías políticas indígenas basadas en el lugar—una en la Amazonía central, donde el estado otorgó licencias de nuevos bloques petroleros en el territorio de Sapara a una compañía china en 2016, y la otra en la comunidad Kichwa de Playas de Cuyabeno, en el norte de la Amazonía, donde la compañía estatal PetroAmazonas ha operado desde la década de 1970—muestra cómo las mujeres han reconfigurado sus identidades étnicas y de género en relación con las compañías petroleras y el estado en el contexto del alza y la caída de los precios del petróleo y, al hacerlo, refuerzan o desafían las posiciones de los líderes masculinos en la estructura interna de sus comunidades y organizaciones.

Keywords: *Neoextractivism, Petroleum, Ethnic identities, Gender, Amazonia*

Neoextractivism in Latin America over the past decade has been characterized by intensified export of hydrocarbons, metals, and minerals and increased income for the state, although historical dependency persists (Gudynas, 2011;

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Svampa, 2013). In countries with “twenty-first-century socialism” such as Ecuador, the intensification of extraction and the expansion of the oil frontier have been justified in terms of the fight against poverty, with primary-goods export surplus allocated to social programs.

The Ecuadorian government led by President Rafael Correa from 2007 to 2017 initiated a centralized state project to transform the national productive structure. This agenda included greater investment in road construction and energy infrastructure and the improvement of public services, particularly in oil extraction sites. Three emblematic projects were intended to create a “New Amazonia”: Ikiam University, the Manta-Manaus multimodal transport corridor, and the Millennium Cities. The latter were intended to increase social inclusion for communities directly affected by extractive activities or by development projects of strategic interest to the state. All these projects were financed during the period of high oil prices (up to 2014) by resources derived from the renegotiation of oil contracts and through loans from China (Wilson and Bayón, 2017: 19–26).

The extractive logic of capitalism thus deepened, contradicting the indigenous concept of *sumak kawsay* (Kichwa for “living well”), which was incorporated into the 2008 Constitution and was based on a relationship of harmony between society and nature that was supposed to guide the country toward a post-oil economy (Acosta, 2013; Cortez, 2014; Oviedo, 2013; Peters, 2014). The national development policy of *buen vivir* (Spanish for “living well”) has, however, become an extractivist ideology that “stems from the sedimented histories, geographies, and social structures of Ecuador’s political economy of oil” (Lu, Valdivia, and Silva, 2017: 23). This new wave of extractivism is transforming the subjectivities of communities, especially in relation to gender and ethnicity, and carries the risk of deepening historical cycles of poverty and marginalization through territorial dispossession.

Extractivism impacts gender relations in complex and often contradictory ways. In the oil extraction zones of Amazonian Ecuador, indigenous women are confronting the territorial, social, and environmental changes through the deployment of strategies that vary according to the way gender relations in their communities have been shaped by their experiences with the oil industry. We present two case studies that compare the strategies of Sapara women from the province of Pastaza (central Amazonia) with those of Kichwa women in the province of Sucumbíos (northern Ecuadorian Amazonia). In order to defend their territory and culture, the Sapara women challenge extractive and governmental development policies and the oil companies, as well as the masculine structure that prevails in their organizations. In contrast, the Kichwa women function in the background of community-state negotiations that are carried out by men. Although this strategy is aimed at obtaining more favorable terms in oil compensation, it also increases gender inequality.

THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE IN EXTRACTION SITES

Latin American studies of extractivism have begun to emphasize the construction of subjectivities in states dependent on oil and mineral exports

(Coronil, 1997; Machado, 2014), but the effects on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class have received less attention. This is notable given that extractivism requires changes in the relations between indigenous communities and nature, involves the dismantling of ethnic identity around territory, and results in the imposition of patriarchal hierarchies linked to capitalism. While political ecology focuses on the political, economic, and social factors causing environmental degradation, the fragmentation of ecosystems, and the incorporation of local economies into capitalist forms of accumulation, feminist political ecology prioritizes the analysis of the gendered experiences of environmental and political-economic change. It understands human beings and nature as immersed in spatialized power relations at the intersections of inequality that are in turn shaped by social and political institutions regulating material production and patterns of consumption and reproduction (Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014; Turner and Brownhill, 2006). In indigenous territories, the penetration of capitalism involves the appropriation and dispossession of women's knowledge and their bodies (Segato, 2008), extending the link between the accumulation of capital and patriarchal violence (Federici, 2004).

Escobar (2008) and Harcourt and Escobar (2005) show how ethnic and gender identities shape social relations of production as part of the articulation of nature and society in neoextractive processes. The subjective construction of territory remains central to an understanding of local and global struggles that are both material and symbolic. "Landscapes appear as gendered terrains that are always under construction through ecological and social relation webs" (Harcourt and Escobar, 2005: 10). Gendered differences are thus part of the ontology and the socialized nature of indigenous worldviews. For example, natural spaces, entities, and beings are visualized by Amazonian peoples through gender categories. The forest is considered masculine, while gardens are mainly feminine (Whitten and Whitten, 1988). This complementarity is the bedrock of the social division of labor between men and women. An abundant anthropological literature shows, however, that gender in indigenous Amazonian communities is not organized along the hierarchical lines prevalent in Western society (Descola, 2001; Gregor and Tuzin, 2001) but anchored in structures of kinship. Symbolic and social processes of kinship infuse the production, consumption, and circulation of food products: men hunt and provide meat while women cultivate manioc (cassava) and other vegetables (Uzendoski, 2004). Amazonian indigenous societies are based on relational rather than on individualist conceptions of gender (Strathern, 1988; Uzendoski, 2004).

Historically constructed gender relations clearly shift as indigenous societies experience economic, social, and political change. According to Garcés (2006), the articulation of Amazonian populations with gendered organizational forms imposed by state institutions, such as the creation of male-centered associations for access to land and production-oriented policies including cattle ranching and monoculture systems, is a departure from traditional models. When indigenous territories are incorporated into extractive economies, local constructions of masculine prestige are motivated by the desire for access to modern consumer goods (Rubenstein, 2004): "Wage-earning, the acquisition of commodities and the control of cash are more associated with men and with contemporary notions of masculine dominance in Amazonia" (Knauff, 1997: 238).

Gender asymmetries deepen in indigenous communities influenced by “extractive resource industries that privilege mobile, male labor in regional economies” (Viatori, 2008: 198).

In Ecuador, politics, economics, culture, and the environment are profoundly affected by the oil industry. Sawyer (2004) shows that neoliberal and extractive policies in the 1990s involved negotiations between multinational oil corporations and local communities that reshaped national, political, and ethnic representations. Our research contributes to an understanding of ethnic and gender subjectivities, helps to identify the multiple scales of power involved in oil extraction, and illuminates the cleavage between productive and reproductive spheres at the heart of capitalist accumulation (Turner and Brownhill, 2006). We adopt a poststructural and feminist approach to political ecology based on qualitative and ethnographic methods. Our fieldwork in Pastaza and Sucumbíos was carried out from March 2014 to March 2016. Data collection included field observation, in-depth interviews and informal conversations with indigenous leaders and men and women from local communities, and unstructured interviews with officials involved with the oil sector and state institutions. We also used participatory methodologies, including social cartography and participatory videos, at the study sites.

CONTESTED SAPARA TERRITORIES ON THE CENTRAL AMAZON OIL FRONTIER

Pastaza is home to seven indigenous nationalities whose territories include previously unexploited tropical rainforests with a high degree of biodiversity. National governments from the end of the 1980s through the 2000s have consistently sought to expand petroleum extraction into this area. When Ecuador’s eleventh oil-licensing round began in late 2012, the state opened up 13 oil blocks (approximately 2.6 million hectares) for exploration. These oil blocks were superimposed on 76 percent of the territories of indigenous Achuar, Andoa, Kichwa, Sapara, Shiwiar, Shuar, and Waorani (Castillo et al., 2016). Oil blocks 79 and 83 were licensed in January 2016 to Andes Petroleum, a consortium of Chinese state-owned firms, and directly affected the Sapara communities along the Conambo, Chuyayaku, and Pindo Rivers. The different positions of these communities with regard to oil extraction can be understood in terms of long-standing intraethnic conflicts over political representation, territorial control, and alliance building (Bilhaut, 2011; Viatori, 2007).

THE HISTORICAL CONSTITUTION OF SAPARA GENDERED TERRAINS

Sapara territory occupies approximately 341,236 hectares in the Montalvo and Rio Tigre districts of Pastaza and is inhabited by a multiethnic population including families established through Sapara-Achuar, Sapara-Andoa, and Sapara-Kichwa marriages. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Sapara were numerous, but during the rubber boom at the beginning of the twentieth century their population was decimated. This was followed by the sudden arrival and settlement of Achuar people in the 1930s and the occupation

of the banks of the San Miguel–Putumayo and Napo Rivers by multiethnic Kichwa-speakers moving into wage labor with the Shell Oil Company (Davidov, 2013: 64), which had begun oil exploration in 1937 (Trujillo, 2001).

The lack of road access to the Sapara communities has helped to preserve their forests, cultural practices, forms of settlement, and animistic ontologies. Subsistence economic activities predominate, and communities have limited access to and dependence on consumer goods and services. A sexual division of labor exists, with women cultivating gardens, making and serving *chicha* (a traditional fermented cassava drink), preparing food, and making clay pots while men hunt and fish, clear the rainforest for new areas of cultivation, and make products for daily use from the forest. Women are fairly autonomous, traveling alone by canoe to bring food home for their children. They may become shamans (spiritual leaders), since Sapara myths assert that the “shamanic vein comes from the mother’s side” (Moya, 2007: 213). Residence for newly married couples is matrilineal, given women’s significant access to territory.

From the 1930s on, Sapara men migrated seasonally to work on plantations and for oil companies in the Amazon, which meant that they earned wages and learned Spanish, while women became more responsible for child care and providing sustenance through tending the fields. These gender differences in geographical and social mobility were exacerbated by the Sapara’s increased engagement in ethnic politics in a region where organizing requires constant travel across great distances and the maintenance of networks with diverse actors (Viatori, 2008: 195). In 1980 the last Sapara shaman established an organization with the aim of recovering and strengthening their indigenous identity and establishing control of their territory. This involved adopting “existing forms of state-recognized organization that emphasize hierarchy and gender segregation” (Viatori, 2008: 196). The 1990s were a period of ethnic and cultural affirmation driven by the need to defend their territory against repeated exploratory incursions by oil companies, including the Burlington Company’s installations along the Conambo River (Moya, 2007). In the process, they sought official state recognition for their ethnicity. In the new discourses of the Sapara’s political organization, “Men are expected to act as cultural brokers between their communities and mestizo society” (Graham, 2002, quoted in Viatori, 2008: 197), which calls for cultural hybridity combining urban and rural, Kichwa and Hispanic, traditional and modern elements. Women, by contrast, are perceived as emblems of indigenous cultural purity (De la Cadena, 1995), and this has meant their exclusion from positions of political responsibility (Viatori, 2008).

Gender roles were also modeled by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that began working in the region in the 1980s and linked the preservation of the tropical forests with the protection of indigenous culture, deploying romanticized notions of indigenous peoples as “innate environmentalists.” These NGOs reinforced representations of indigenous women as protectors of indigenous traditional knowledge and of Mother Earth (Muratorio, 1998), seeking to empower indigenous women as producers of traditional pottery and as knowledgeable about medicinal plants and health. As a consequence, women have often adopted a self-essentializing discourse as defenders of the Sapara language, culture, and history.



Figure 1. Sapara women marching to defend their territories. Photo © Ivette Vallejo

ETHNIC AND GENDER IDENTITIES RECONFIGURED BY DEVELOPMENT AND EXTRACTION

Since the end of the 1990s, Sapara communities have been divided between “autonomous” antiextractivist communities and mixed-ethnic evangelical communities (Sapara, Achuar, and Andoa) more willing to negotiate with the state and the hydrocarbons companies. During 2003–2005, an aggressive expansion of the oil frontier toward the central and southern regions of the Amazon reignited tensions in Sapara territory between those who seek recognition of indigenous ethnic and cultural difference and those who want inclusion and social mobility (Martínez Novo, 2009).

Sapara leaders, mostly male, became more sophisticated in interacting and negotiating with the state and other development actors. Though the Sapara factions converged in 2009 in the Nación Sapara del Ecuador (Sapara Nation of Ecuador—NASE), rifts quickly appeared, particularly in the process leading up to the eleventh oil-licensing round. In February 2012 leaders of the NASE signed on to a resolution of indigenous people and nationalities rejecting oil activity in their territories (see Figure 1).

In July 2012 the organization declared Decree 1247 unconstitutional, arguing that the “prior consultation” it prescribed did not conform to international standards for indigenous rights. The NASE has since split into pro- and anti-oil factions. Up until late 2017, the NASE president was supported by communities favorable to oil activity and was legitimated by the state while the governing council elected by anti-oil communities¹ was excluded from the national registry of legally recognized social organizations (Castillo et al., 2016). The

NASE leadership representing pro-oil communities signed investment agreements with the Ministry of Hydrocarbons in 2013 to get access to state services, including those provided by the public company Ecuador Estratégico, which was responsible for building infrastructure in strategic areas. From the perspective of the families opposed to oil activity, these leaders are not “real” Sapara. Not only are the communities they represent more ethnically mixed but the former president, a migrant originally from Montalvo, is considered “half Andoa, half Kichwa.” Anti-oil communities criticize the NASE leadership’s decisions regarding Sapara territory, claiming a “purer” ethnicity that seeks to protect and preserve not only their indigenous culture but also the jungle, nature, and the spirits inhabiting their territory (Vallejo, 2014).

Sapara women in these communities are considered more “culturally authentic” and have become active defenders of their territory, culture, and nature in the antiextraction movement in Pastaza. While they recognize that their communities need basic services and educational infrastructure, they argue that these should not be acquired at the price of acceptance of extractive activities. Questioning the governmental characterization of Amazon communities as “poor,” they argue that wealth resides in the forests, water sources, diverse fruits and seeds, and other natural elements that ensure their well-being. In this sense, they question extractive and development interventions in the Amazon, contrasting the government’s perspectives with their own vision of *sumak kawsay* (María Guadalupe Ruiz, interview, Torimbo, 2014):

Sumak kawsay is when there is healthy nature, healthy jungle, healthy rivers when the lagoon, river, waterfall, natural food, *chicha*, rivers are without pollution. We do not want the oil companies, because they come to pollute, to damage all of this. We have seen that there is no development with the oil company. They offer good houses, good schools, but instead, they come to take our territory. We have every right to defend ourselves. We do not want our jungle to be damaged. Not only men, women will also stop them! We are willing to defend our territory, and we will never give way to the oil companies!

Women’s daily work in their *chacras* (swidden plots) keeps them in close contact with natural and supernatural beings in a relationship of mutual sustenance. By caring for the plants, carefully bathing cassava cuttings in achiote, brushing them, and striking them in a particular way they call on the spirit that ensures a healthy harvest. In defense of their territories, Sapara women have begun to take on more public political roles, not only in their community spaces but also in the Amazonian city of Puyo, in Quito, and internationally. One of the most public leaders is Gloria Ushigua, daughter of the last shaman, Blas Ushigua. According to Viatori (2007), she emerged as a leader partly because of her disregard for prescribed gender roles and her “hybrid” upbringing (she reads and writes Spanish). Nevertheless, as a political activist she has taken advantage of the Sapara’s ethno-political discourse, positioning herself as “more truthful” than her male counterparts. Along with other indigenous women of the central Amazon, she questions the male leaders who signed the agreements accepting the eleventh oil-licensing round.

Ushigua established the Sapara Women’s Association of Ecuador, which worked with community-based Sapara, Shiwiar, Waorani, and Kichwa

women to organize a march of indigenous women from the Amazon to Quito in October 2013 demanding respect for their collective rights and preventing the entry of oil companies into their territories. In Quito, the National Assembly briefly received them, although the president did not. In August 2014 she helped the community of Torimbo construct cabins close to the Danta wells with the goal of defending the land from incursion by the Andes Petroleum Company. She has also fostered exchanges concerning territorial and cultural rights and the impacts of oil in the northern Amazon, nationally and with international organizations such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and the United Nations. She and other Sapara women share strategies with other anti-oil communities, seeking alternative economic activities such as ecotourism while maintaining “dream techniques” that can forewarn of threats and orient action (Bilhaut, 2011). Ushigua (interview, Puyo, 2014) explained:

The rainforest is our house and our orchard because it contains everything we want: animals, fish, palm hearts, fruits, seeds; rivers where the children can play. The government wants to destroy that wealth and destroy the indigenous people. We have traveled to communities to hold workshops explaining how oil will destroy our happiness, our earth, the animals. We want the government to leave oil under the ground. We have also reported this to the United Nations.

Until recently, indigenous women in Pastaza have had limited access to organizational positions at the communal or federation levels. During the neoliberal period (1980–2006), when “the state tried to concede blocks to transnational companies in Pastaza, women participated in roadblocks, putting their bodies in front of military vehicles, and took over the oil company bases to slow seismic prospecting” (Vallejo and García, 2017: 12). Thousands of women participated in the emblematic indigenous march from Puyo to Quito in 1992 demanding the legalization of their nationalities’ territories. In 1997, during the second march of the Pastaza Indigenous Peoples’ Organization against the expansion of the oil industry, women again played an active role, considering themselves *sinchi huarmikuna* (powerful women) (Sawyer, 2004). In their own narratives, indigenous women throughout Ecuador are active in demonstrations for the defense of their territory, life, and dignity. Yet this role is often obscured, given that “political negotiations, dialogue with external actors, and public recognition are in the hands of male leaders” (Vallejo and García, 2017: 12).

In addition to participating in the October 2013 march to Quito, Kichwa women visited communities along the river to aware them about the impacts of oil extraction, questioning the power structures of the male-led organizations that exclude them (Vallejo, Duhalde, and Valdivieso, 2017: 58–59). Some women have recently assumed leadership functions in indigenous Kichwa organizations in Sarayaku and Curaray, as well as in the NASE. Indigenous women have become spokespersons at press conferences and have legally challenged state intimidation of antimining protesters. Yet these women find themselves increasingly vulnerable to legal persecution and harassment by both police and pro-oil leaders from neighboring communities.

KICHWA WOMEN IN THE OIL TERRITORIES OF SUCUMBÍOS

In the northeastern Amazon, oil exploitation began in the 1970s. The consequent extraction and exploitation of natural resources caused an intense and disorderly migration to the provinces of Napo, Orellana, and Sucumbíos. Our research focused on the Kichwa community of Playas de Cuyabeno on the Aguarico and Cuyabeno Rivers in Sucumbíos. In this riverine area historically integrated into development and market dynamics, ethnic and gender identities have been reshaped by efforts at social mobility in which increasing one's cultural and ethnic *mestizaje* multiplies one's opportunities for access to goods and services.

HISTORICAL CONFIGURATIONS OF ETHNICITY AND GENDER

The banks of the Aguarico River have long been an important transit area for Amazon populations. From the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century, the region was dominated by the Encabellado and Cofán indigenous groups, direct ancestors of the contemporary Siona and Siekóya-pai (Little, 2001). This area of the Upper Amazon basin began a process of "Kichwaization" in the second half of the nineteenth century as increasing numbers of Kichwa-speakers from Tena and Archidona arrived in areas originally occupied by Siona, Siekóya-pai, and Tetete people. The Kichwa-speakers, the result of the fusion of Amazonian native peoples that adopted Kichwa as their language, settled along the Aguarico, San Miguel, and Putumayo Rivers, attracted by the possibility of riverine trade in the products of hunting and husbandry. During the twentieth century they became skilled at negotiating exchanges with merchants and landowners (Little, 2001) while maintaining practices such as shamanism that slowed their cultural assimilation. In the 1940s and 1950s a new phase of Kichwaization took place through interregional trade along the borders of Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru based on hunting of animals such as the jaguar and the manatee. Families of different ethnic affiliations brought in by Colombian patrons looking for rubber, furs, and other tropical-forest products settled in the area. The first Kichwa-speakers to settle in the Playas de Cuyabeno area were natives of the Peruvian side of the Napo River. A missionary school established by the Capuchin missionaries in the 1970s was later converted into a public school that attracted more multiethnic settlement.

Traditional Amazonian Kichwa communities consisted of extended families characterized by subsistence economies with a clear division of labor by gender. Among the Kichwa of the northern Amazon, men's roles were traditionally connected to market and community activities, with limited participation in the reproductive or domestic sphere. These differences were intensified by area's significant trade and river mobility. In this context, gender relations were shaped by the influence of Catholic missionaries who emphasized the nuclear family and male leadership, but market incorporation amplified the differentiated roles of men and women in subsistence and market-oriented productive practices and contributed to gender inequality. As natural resources were increasingly exploited and colonized by migrants from other parts of Ecuador, indigenous populations' access to their traditional territories was limited and

their natural resources became polluted and degraded. This resulted in the strengthening of gender hierarchies (Garcés, 2006) as family strategies were increasingly oriented toward the market.

Extractive activities have taken place in areas near Playas de Cuyabeno, particularly along the Napo River, for decades. With the first oil exploration between the 1920s and the 1940s and its resumption in the 1960s, Kichwa men worked as guides or found odd jobs, gaining greater mobility and access to cash income (Muratorio, 1998). A majority of Kichwa males worked in the 1970s–1980s oil boom in nearby Napo province for Western, Compagnie Générale de Géophysique, and GeoSur. Women remained rooted in the territory and the subsistence economy, supplying their households with the products they cultivated, fished for, and hunted. They practiced traditional activities such as cassava cultivation and chicha processing as well as selling products locally. As families became more dependent on market-provided food products, women began to reduce the time they spent cultivating subsistence crops. As Garcés (2006) shows, in Kichwa northern Amazon communities, modernizing dynamics reduced the importance of family farms for subsistence. The “loss of the ritualized relation of young women to the land [is] considered one of the causes of the undermining of the chacras and the diminution of the productivity of the cassava” (Garcés, 2006: 100).² While their subsistence activities were devalued, women were also marginalized from decision making, increasing gender inequalities in a context defined by patterns of masculine interactions between communities and with the oil industry and the state. From the 1990s on, some men and women from Playas worked in tourism, with the cruise ship *Flotel Orellana* operating in the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve. The protected natural area was not exempt from oil exploration activities or from oil spills and environmental degradation (Little, 2001). Texaco’s operations in the territories of Siona, Siekóya-pai, and A’Indeku peoples led to a steadily increasing awareness of oil industry pollution in Sucumbíos (Kimerling, 1993).

THE PLAYAS DE CUYABENO MILLENNIUM CITY

PetroAmazonas, a subsidiary of the national oil company PetroEcuador, began oil exploration in the territory surrounding Playas de Cuyabeno in 2008. In response, community leaders from Playas and surrounding communities began to discuss forming an indigenous oil company, but this project did not go far. Instead, PetroEcuador entered into negotiations with a group of Playas de Cuyabeno families in Santa Elena (where an oil field was planned) that had created a new association in an effort to receive benefits directly from the state. In October 2008 PetroEcuador began shipping machinery downriver to initiate seismic activities in the Santa Elena area. Playas de Cuyabeno community members busy with a communal work project were surprised to see the large barges, escorted by soldiers, passing by and quickly mobilized. One woman said, “We climbed onto the barge. We stopped it! There were wounded comrades, wounded soldiers. The company wanted to enter by force, without our community’s authorization. The Santa Elena families wanted to keep the benefits for themselves, to exclude us” (Maribel Gualinga,



Figure 2. The Cuyabeno Millennium City. Photo © Ivette Vallejo

interview, Playas de Cuyabeno, 2014). Women joined in the fight, preparing plant-based concoctions to be launched against the workers and the military.

The conflict lasted for close to a month, after which negotiations focused on compensation measures involving access to basic services, housing, education, and salaried work for the oil company began between government officials, the state oil company, and the male leaders of the three communities affected. A Millennium City was built on the former site of the communal center of Playas on the Aguarico River, which had been occupied by some 20 families. Its construction transformed the community's predominantly semidispersed settlement pattern as many community members came to live in one of its 68 houses (Figure 2).

Each house had electricity, potable water, and a fiber-optic Internet connection, and its residents received an electric-induction stove, household furniture, a computer, and two bicycles. The community became urban, fenced off from the protected natural reserve, with parks, gardens, and streets. A modern sports arena, a medical center, a police station, a market, a cemetery, and a school complex were built as well. Referring to this infrastructure, Maribel Gualinga (interview, Playas de Cuyabeno, 2014) proudly stated: "Thanks to our struggle, we have all this. Otherwise, we would have nothing. We would be in the same misery as before. We would have let ourselves be overwhelmed by the company as other companies have always done with communities. This is our land, our resources, and we have fought for this."

As with the effort to start their own oil company, the Kichwa residents of Playas insisted on their indigenous territorial right to participate in and benefit from the national oil economy. At the Millennium City's inauguration in October 2013, Correa declared the new town evidence of the construction of a New Amazon to be built with surplus oil revenues as a way of restoring the rights of marginalized populations. At a time of high commodity prices, he promised 200 more such cities on sites linked to oil extraction. Even though for

more than three decades men from Playas had been seasonally connected with the regional oil economy, the construction of the Millennium City meant the direct incorporation of their communal territory into extractive and development logics. It reconfigured ethnic identifications and relations within the community and with surrounding communities. Increased dependence on money made economic disparities and class mobility more pronounced, strengthening ethnic and gender hierarchies through urbanizing and domesticizing the care work that women performed (Cielo and Vega, 2017). Cultural interdependence with nature shifted as young Kichwa women increasingly lived in private domestic spaces with an urbanized lifestyle and more rigid gender roles. Women were not permitted to have crops or animals near their houses, to smoke meat on an open fire, or to make chicha. The regulation of these activities by Ecuador Estratégico further reduced women's autonomy in the management of their swidden agriculture. Young mothers whose children attended the new Millennium School felt compelled to dedicate much more time than before to the cleaning of their homes instead of working on their farms.

Along with oil extraction activities and the increased circulation of monetary income, alcohol consumption had become more of a problem. A Kichwa woman in Playas explained, "Alcohol consumption has increased since the oil company came. They now sell beer in the small stores here. With that, violence and mistreatment toward women and children have gotten worse" (Digna Grefa, interview, Playas de Cuyabeno, 2014). The Millennium School provided access to formal education and modeled the way to become a mestizo. Ethnic identities were stigmatized, and children internalized racial hierarchies and slurs: "He smells like a Cofán" and "dirty Indian" are only some of the most vivid examples of mestizo and Kichwa denigration of local indigenous identities. Indigenous girls suffered even more from sexist attitudes than mestizo and Kichwa girls, who explained, "They don't say anything, they just let it happen" (focus group, Playas de Cuyabeno youth, 2014). Mothers and their children increasingly focused on professional goals, with the boys looking toward future employability in the oil industry, as families minimized their indigenous identification to better position themselves in an urbanized economy. Playas community members, in general, sought class mobility by differentiating themselves from their indigenous neighbors. Men believed that their power and prestige increased as they negotiated the Ecuadorian government's development and extractive policies and strategically adopted a mestizo-oriented identity.

GENDER HIERARCHIES IN A VOLATILE ECONOMY

Economic differentiation accelerated as families directly affected by oil-exploration activities received large amounts of cash, which was managed by men. Those who received compensation from 2010 to 2013 bought speedboats, fiberglass canoes with motors, and pickup trucks, which they used while working for PetroAmazonas. When the company began operations in the area, the construction of oil platforms required labor and transportation services, generating monthly infusions of cash from 2014 to 2015 that had never been seen before. With men's paid work, many families shifted from agriculture and

fishing to purchasing products from stores, but global declines in oil prices since 2015 have brought unemployment and generated uncertainty.

Though some older and middle-aged women maintained their chacras, young couples with children at school or those with salaried work no longer tended to their farms. In those cases, the sphere of women's expertise—the intimate knowledge of swidden agriculture—was devalued by the dynamics of temporary salaries. A middle-aged resident of Playas (Norma Jipa, interview, Playas de Cuyabeno, 2014) recalled:

We knew where to hike to collect green plantains and cassava to make the chicha for the *mingas* (community work). Now we only have those on the farms [which are] far [away]. On the farm, we live growing the cassava, the *verde*, but when we're here [in the Millennium City] and can't go to the farm there are no plantains, no cassava, nothing. . . . It's not the same anymore.

In contrast to the ecological NGOs in the central Amazon, which emphasized links between environmental and indigenous rights,³ the ones in the Cuyabeno area promoted development and conservation projects. PetroAmazonas is now promoting chicken-raising and small coffee production projects similar to those sponsored by transnational oil companies throughout the Amazon. Jenkins and Obara (2006) have shown that these kinds of projects do not empower women and their families but rather promote dependence on the companies. Gender inequality has increased in Playas because women's workload has increased and because their unpaid work is devalued in comparison with the paid work of men. However, as families experience the precariousness of the volatile oil economy, Kichwa women's traditional reproductive work and its associated knowledge have become indispensable for family sustenance.

THE DISEMPOWERING OF WOMEN IN THE OIL ECONOMY

Indigenous federations and associations in northern Amazonia began to form during the 1970s and 1980s in an effort to stop the expansion of agricultural and livestock farming that threatened indigenous land possession. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon, formed in 1980, supported the organization of the small ethnic groups most affected by oil activity. Over time, the organization's emphasis shifted to oil-community relations, initially managed by the transnationals but now in the hands of the state. The focus was on negotiating productive projects and receiving better compensation for negative environmental impacts. Indigenous women achieved leadership positions related to women's and family issues but had limited access to higher positions.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, NGOs encouraging productive projects worked with independent women's organizations in Sucumbíos. The Asociación de Mujeres de Nacionalidad Kichwa de Sucumbíos Ecuador (Kichwa Women's Association—AMNKISE), linked to the Kichwa Federación de Organizaciones de la Nacionalidad Kichwa de Sucumbíos Ecuador (Sucumbios Federation of Kichwa Organizations), was one of these organizations. AMNKISE was primarily organized around issues of reproductive health and domestic violence and was supported by international organizations ded-

icated to gender equality such as UN Women, the UN Population Fund, and the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives. Unlike the Sapara Women's Association, however, AMNKISE has not specifically dealt with territoriality or the situation of women in extractive contexts. High oil prices since 2007, increased government control of NGOs, and economic crises in metropolitan states have led to the abandonment of international cooperation projects in the Andean region.

Under Correa and now Lenín Moreno, indigenous organizations in the northern Amazon have become increasingly articulated around the promises of development offered by the state. Siona, Siekóya-pai, A'I Cofán, and Kichwa leaders supported Correa, even in the face of mobilizations critical of the government throughout the country such as the Democracy Vigil in August 2015 in Quito (Vallejo, Duhalde, and Valdivieso, 2017). For the most part, these organizations have internalized the government's rhetoric that oil revenues can provide *buen vivir*. Women may have mobilized to prevent the entry of workers and materials for the construction of oil platforms when PetroAmazonas originally entered the territory, but since then male intermediation between the community, the state, and the company has dominated.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined the ways in which the expansion of oil exploration and extraction in the Ecuadorian Amazon has accelerated the ethnic, class, and gender dimensions of territorial transformation, with specific impacts on indigenous women's political and economic strategies. In Pastaza, where new oil blocks were licensed in 2016, the Sapara assert a "pure" Sapara ethnicity in disputes over territory and political representation of nationality. Women's identities are reinforced by the politics of place as they organize in articulation with women of diverse Amazon nationalities to defend the coexistence of a diversity of beings, including the fauna and spiritual entities of the forest. Sapara women have been successful in positioning themselves in decision making about their territory, challenging men's historical negotiations with the state and the oil companies. In Playas de Cuyabeno, in contrast, modern services and infrastructure have been established as governmental compensation for extractive activities, and communal territory is controlled by the state oil company. Ethnic and gender identities are linked to socioeconomic differentiation based on consumption, in which assimilation to hybrid, mestizo identities allows women and their families to better position themselves in class hierarchies.

Political ecologies of difference are the outcome of place-based processes emerging from historically shaped gendered and ethnic identities that are now articulated with oil contexts and the capitalization of nature. Indigenous women find unequal opportunities within the development policies tied to the extraction of fossil resources for the world market, and this tends to devalue their sphere of social reproduction linked to nature and culture. In this adverse scenario, the ability of women to question gender hierarchies may be central to defending collective rights.

We have seen that indigenous women's political demands may be based on cultural norms and women's assigned roles, deploying a kind of "strategic

essentialism" (Spivak, 1977) that in the Sapara case and that of other women in Pastaza is evident in their self-representation as "guardians of culture" (Pequeño, 2007) and "defenders of nature." In territorial struggles over oil exploitation, Sapara women organized around antiextraction demands may challenge male leadership as they reinforce cultural practices and their traditional roles in the management of the subsistence economy. When extractive activities are well-established in community dynamics, as is the case in the northern Amazon, gender and ethnic roles reinforce social hierarchies. In the context of market incorporation and mobility, women are placed in a subordinate position both in social relations and in the organizational structure that represents the community.

NOTES

1. Communities considered "autonomous" that defend their territories from oil exploitation include Llanchamacocha, Jandiyaku, Masaramu, Ayamu, Nina Muricha, Torimbo, Naku, and Naruka. Among those willing to negotiate for the benefits of oil extraction, with greater Achuar and Andoa presence and evangelical influence, are Conambo, Alto Corrientes, Cuyacocha, Garzayacu, Guiririma, Shiona, New Santa Rosa, New Amazon, Balsaura, Lupuna, Pumayacu, Pindoyaku, Chyayaku, and Atatakuinjia.

2. Communities closer to roads and oil platforms have less agrobiodiversity, both because of their reduced emphasis on production and rotation and because soils and productivity are affected.

3. NGOs such as Ecolex, Fundación Natura, and the Italian UCODEP have worked in Playas. In the central Amazon, Acción Ecológica and Fundación Pachamama and, earlier, Ecociencia and the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation have worked with Sapara communities.

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