Valuation struggles in the Ecuadorian Amazon:

Oil 'non-conflicts' and the inevitability of change among the Quichua people of the Lower Napo River

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by

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the acceptance of the ITT oil extraction project by the Quichua communities of the Lower Napo River, in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and the consequences of such a project on people and territories. It sheds light on the structural mechanisms behind the apparent inevitability of oil extraction, development and change in the *ribera* – despite the struggles each step of incorporation triggers and ultimately leading to the weakening of already-weakened subsistence economies and an ecological crisis at the local level. The thesis seeks to reconceptualise the frameworks of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts – developed by Martinez-Alier (2002) and Escobar (2008) respectively in political ecology to explain the opposition of indigenous and poor people to ecologically damaging projects in their territories – in order to contribute to the search for solutions to the global ecological crisis which is at the heart of the project ecological economics. It argues, in particular, that because 1) valuation at one point in time is different from values and 2) values change in the process of change, indigenous people might embrace ecologically damaging projects in their territories in spite of their ecological and cultural 'difference' (Escobar, 2008), and in the name of 'equality'. Oil extraction might thus result in non-conflictive, yet problematic situations rather than conflict. It follows that the challenge, rather than the use of alternative decision-making tools (such as multi-criteria analysis), which would allow a 'better' choice between various alternatives which are not satisfactory anyway, lies in the design of development alternatives which would go beyond the recurrent dilemma between 'difference' (the preservation of culture and the environment) and 'equality' (development), systematically faced not only by a growing number of indigenous people around the world but by the human species as a whole, in the context of an unprecedented ecological crisis.

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Glossary

Afectado/a(s): affected

Agua entubada: piped water

Ahora/ahorita: right now, nowadays, or today depending on the context

Ambición: ambition, greed

Ambicioso/a(s): ambitious/greedy

Asamblea: monthly gathering between the *socios* to discuss different matters of the community. I keep the Spanish word in the thesis, although it could be translated as 'assembly'

Alcanzar: to be enough [*no alzanza*: it is not enough]

Aprovechar: to take advantage

Buen vivir: is the Spanish translation of the Quichua concept of '*sumak kawsay*' – defined by Fernandez-Marti as "an ancestral lifestyle and indigenous spiritual idea where the human being is in complete equilibrium and harmony with its environment and universe as a whole" (Fernandez-Marti 2012: 20) – which would literally translate as 'the good life' in English. I keep *buen vivir* in the thesis, since this is the expression used by the inhabitants of the Lower Napo River.

Capacitado: trained or educated

Capataz: foreman

Carne de monte: bush meat

Centro poblado: populated centre

Chicha, warapo and vinillo: traditional beverages made of fermented yucca

Comedor: Comedores refer to small places (restaurants) where people it daily, the local food which has been prepared by the owner of the restaurant, in this case (Tiputini) often a woman. They translate as dining rooms in English.

Compañero/a(s): fellow(s) or comrade(s)

Conscientizarse: become aware/ realise

Consulta previa: prior consultation

Convenio: refers in this context to an agreement between the company and the local state whereby both parties will finance the infrastructure, which will be built by the company and later managed by the Municipality. Can translate more generally as convention or agreement.

Desconocer: to ignore

Estudio: assessment or study

Finca: The *finca* includes the Quichua house and the *chakra* [farm], which includes both cultivations and animals. Every family normally has one and they usually grow yucca and plantain. It can translate as farm or plot.

Gasolina: petrol – in this context, for the motors for the boats

Guangana: carne de monte [bush meat] – see figure 28.

Guatusa: another small animal from the forest that people hut and eat.

Indemnización: The *indemnización* is given to the inhabitants in exchange for the use of the land. It is compulsory and in theory, it is decided by a third party (DINAC), although in practice it often results in a direct negotiation between the firm and the communities (Becerra et al. 2013). I sometimes translate it as indemnities.

Indígena: indigenous people

Mesa de información: information desk

Mestizo/a(s): is usually used for people of combined European and indigenous descent. In the Lower Napo River, it refers to anyone who is not indigenous and comes from another part of the country.

Minga: weekly or monthly gathering between the *socios* of the community to carry some communitarian work (agricultural, cleaning, painting, building, etc.). Can be translated as work party.

Motosierra: chainsaw

Municipio: Municipality

Operador(a): operator

Ordenanza: ordinance

Paternalismo: paternalism

Patrones: patrons

Petrolera: oil company

Políticas: politics

Pobre: poor

Pobrecito/a(s): poor little thing(s)

Pobreza: poverty

Pueblo (el): the village or the city

Quebrada: ravine

Rescate de la cultura: rescuing of the culture

Ribera: name given to the Napo River and the communities which surround it

Salir adelante: to move forward

Ser preparados: to be educated/ to have knowledge

Sísmica: seismic study

Socializar/socialización: There is no good English translation for the Spanish word *socializar*. It means to inform and explain at the same time and is often used by the communities and local governments to talk about state 'projects' being offered to indigenous people or carried in indigenous territories. I sometimes translate it as 'socialize'.

Socio/socia: approved member of the community over 18 years old

Taller: workshop

Tecnología de punta: cutting-edge technology

Trago: drink of alcohol

Turno: collective boat (large canoe with motor) which runs daily between Nuevo Rocafuerte and Coca (Francisco de Orellana), the capital of the Orellana Province situated 300 kilometres up the river – a 7 to 10-hour trip.

List of acronyms

CBA: Cost-benefit analysis

CONGA: Consorcio de Gobiernos Provinciales de la Amazonia (Consortium of Amazonian Provincial Governments)

CONAIE: Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador)

CONFENIAE: Confederación De Nacionalidades Indígenas De La Amazonia Ecuatoriana (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon)

DINAC: Dirección Nacional de Avalúos y Catastros (National Direction of Valuation and land registry)

DRC: Departamento de Relaciones Comunitarias (Department of Communitarian Relations)

EE: Ecuador Estratégico (Strategic Ecuador)

EIA: Estudio de Impacto Ambiental (Environmental Impact Assessment)

ESH: Estudio Socio-Histórico (Socio-Historical Study)

FAL: *Fundación Alejandro Labaka*

GAD: Gobierno Autónomo Decentralizado (Autonomous Decentralized Government)

ITT: Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini

MAE: Ministerio del Ambiente del Ecuador (Ecuadorian Ministry of the Environment)

MAGAP: Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería, Acuacultura y Pesca (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fishing)

MCA: Multi-criteria análisis

ONHAE: Organización de la Nacionalidad Huaorani del Ecuador (Organization of the Huaorani Nationality of the Ecuadorian Amazon)

OPIP: Organización de los Pueblos Indígenas del Pastaza (Organisation of Indigenous People of Pastaza)

PAM: Petroamazonas

PE: political ecology

PM: Plan de Manejo (Management Plan)

PMA: Plan de Manejo Ambiental (Environmental Management Plan)

PRAS: Programa de Reparación Ambiental y Social (Programme for Environmental and Social Reparation)

PRC: Plan de Relaciones Comunitarias (Plan of Communitarian Relations)

Senagua: Secretaría Nacional del Agua (National Secretariat of Water)

YNP: Yasuní National Park

Introduction

"In the western Amazon alone, at least 50 indigenous groups, many of which are the world's last isolated indigenous peoples, live within oil and gas concessions that are under exploration or preproduction" (O'Rourke & Connolly, 2003: 596).

Ecuador is the sixth producer of oil in Latin America, and fourth if we include its proven reserves (Fontaine, 2004ba). Oil was discovered in the Ecuadorian Amazon in 1967 by a Texaco-Gulf consortium (Hurtig & San Sebastian, 2002) and was extracted from 1972. This marked the beginning of the oil era, soon replacing cacao and banana as the first product for primary export (Juteau, 2012). Forty years of oil extraction were mostly characterised by slow economic growth[1], high inequalities and poverty (Larrea, 2014b), and some authors described oil development as a perfect illustration of the 'resource curse' (Acosta, 2011; Fontaine, 2002; Larrea, 2006; Moore & Velásquez, 2011) – establishing a negative correlation between resource per-capita and economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s (Sachs & Warner, 2001).

But national debates over the reliance of the country on oil development were not limited to its economic dimension. As in many countries of high biodiversity and large indigenous populations, oil development in Ecuador illustrates the widely commented contradictions arising between development and the preservation of the environment. Ecuador is the country with the densest biodiversity in the world (Dangles, 2009) and counts with fourteen indigenous nationalities[2] (Fernandez-Marti, 2012). In the Ecuadorian Amazon, oil extraction overlaps the territories of ten indigenous groups (Finer, Jenkins, Pimm, Keane, & Ross, 2008).

The problem (theoretical)

The interactions between indigenous people and resource extraction companies worldwide have historically been antagonistic (Bebbington, 2011; Lertzman & Vredenburg, 2005;

[1] 1.6 per cent per year between 1971 and 2009 (Larrea, 2014b).
[2] They represent 25 to 45 per cent of the population depending on the estimates (Fernandez-Marti, 2012)

O'Rourke & Connolly, 2003) but the western Amazon region, where oil extraction is the story of a "massive ecological and social disruption" (Finer et al., 2008: 178), concentrates the literature on this topic. While they have often been interpreted as 'economic distribution conflicts' (Escobar, 2006a), over the distribution of the oil rent, such conflicts have taken a particular shape in Latin America, and in Ecuador. Notably, two frameworks emerged to analyse them, as ecological and cultural distribution conflicts. The frameworks come from Martinez-Alier (2002) and Escobar (2008) respectively. Through their analysis, oil extraction represents a direct threat for indigenous people for whom the environment is a provider of livelihood and cultural identity – an ecological and cultural 'difference' (Escobar, 2008). Ecological and cultural distribution conflicts are conflicts over the meaning assigned to Nature by different groups in society. They constitute clashes of incommensurable values (Martinez-Alier, 2002), because such attachment to the environment cannot easily be compensated by money. An important implication is that monetary compensation cannot solve the oil conflict.

The two frameworks are part of the current of political ecology, an interdisciplinary field born in the 1980s out of the failure of 'sustainable development' to address environmental problems (Bryant, 1998). They embody a critique of what their authors see as a 'weak[3]' interpretation of sustainability, which considers environmental problems as externalities which could be internalised through the creation of environmental markets and the assignation of property rights (Escobar, 1995; Escobar, 1998; Escobar, 1999; Martinez-Alier, 1995; Martinez-Alier, 2002); as it has been the preferred approach of the sustainable development consensus since the Bruntland report (Bernstein, 2002). At the core of their criticism lies the concept of incommensurability of values: it is impossible to put a price on "the ecological value of ecosystems, the respect for sacredness, the urgency of livelihood" (Martinez-Alier, 2002: 150).

[3] "An economy is deemed to be sustainable (in the weak sense) if the ratio of savings to income (which allows investment) is larger than the sum of the ratios of depreciation of human-made capital and "natural capital"" (Martinez-Alier, 1995: 5).

Moreover, the enterprise of valuing the environment favours one 'language of valuation' (Martinez-Alier, 2009), monetary, over many other possible languages and units of measurement. Instead, ecological and cultural distribution conflicts point to the need to reembed economic decisions in ecological and cultural considerations (Escobar, 2008). In order to do so, ecological economics proposes to go beyond the standard assumption of strong comparability of values (Martinez-Alier, 1994) to embrace the concept of incommensurability, in decision-making. In practice, ecological economists call for the development of multi-criteria methods of valuation (Faucheux & O'Connor, 1998; Munda, 2004). Multi-criteria analyses (MCA) are defined as "the methodological and mathematical tools to operationalize the concept of incommensurability"(Martinez-Alier, Munda, & O'Neill, 1998: 277). They can take into account many dimensions of a problem in the decision-making process (Martinez-Alier, Munda, & O'Neill, 2001) and the fact that they cannot be compared on "a common unit of measurement" (Martinez-Alier et al., 1998: 282). In other words, they are based on an assumption of weak comparability of values (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1994; Gómez-Baggethun, De Groot, Lomas, & Montes, 2010; Martinez-Alier et al., 1998; O'Connor, M. & Spash, 1999).

As it can be expected from a tool which seeks to take incommensurability into account, MCA are mathematically ill-defined. However, they can be operationalised through the assignation of weights to the different dimensions of a problem – often interpreted as weights of relative importance (Polatidis, Haralambopoulos, Munda, & Vreeker, 2006). As the value of each dimension will differ from a group to another, MCA require a process of discussion and debate over the weights to be assigned, between the different stakeholders (Gamper & Turcanu, 2007; Munda, 2004). In the case of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts, the use of MCA is expected to reverse the power asymmetries between indigenous people, on one hand, and their states and extractive industries, on the other hand, by taking the 'language of valuation'

(Martinez-Alier, 2002) of the former into account in the decision process – ultimately resulting in more ecologically sustainable policy decisions being made.

The frameworks were widely deployed in the analysis of Latin American social movements (Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010). In Ecuador, they were used to describe the oil conflict arising from the 1990s, between a powerful indigenous movement (Jameson, 2011) and foreign oil companies. At the same time, and in Ecuador, notably, they cannot help fully understanding the struggle of local indigenous people, whose heterogeneous claims were sometimes accommodated through the material and social compensation brought by large oil companies in their territories (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013; Sabin, 1998; Fontaine, 2004a; Fontaine 2009a). The limits of the frameworks arguably lie in the implicit assumption of a reversed 'hierarchy of needs' (Martinez-Alier, 2002). Indeed, while they are not only dependent on the environment but also materially poor, the people described by Martinez-Alier and Escobar are not expected to accept monetary compensation: the environment is not only incommensurable with money, but more important for them. More broadly, their development considerations are subordinated to the value they attach to the environment. To use Escobar's vocabulary, while their goal is 'difference-in-equality'[4] (Escobar, 2008), 'equality' is subordinated to the struggle for 'difference', embedded in livelihood and cultural identity, in the writings of both authors.

The criticism arising from the study of the Ecuadorian conflict sees what they consider to be a 'standard narrative' (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013) as essentialising the struggles of indigenous people, which embody not only ecological and cultural dimensions, but economic, social, political and ethic ones (Fontaine, 2004a). By portraying indigenous people as conservationists (Valdivia, 2005) and against all kind of development[5] (Sabin, 1998), the criticism goes, they

[4] While 'equality' is defined as the ability not to be treated as hierarchically inferior (but is not given content a priori and can be a component of indigenous people's 'life projects', which content is also contextual), difference-in-equality' consists in reaching 'equality' without being denied one's cultural 'difference'.
[5] They often refer to local variants of political ecology rather than to the frameworks directly.

can only explain extractive compromises as externally imposed: a non-choice. Their critique presents many similarities with Popkin's who, in 1980, criticised the moral economy tradition whose 'essentialist' view of peasants – as only concerned with maintaining their subsistence levels – led to see change as imposed on, and harmful for them. A similar debate emerged in anthropology more recently, with the criticism of the ontological turn in social theory (Bessire, 2014; Cameron, 2010; Cepek, 2011; Gray, A., 1997b). And the pervasive debate around indigenous people's development values ultimately results, in all its different versions, in a recognition of the mixed worldviews of indigenous people, which comes as the logical result of their partial integration (Alvard, 1993; Gaonkar, 1999; Kuper et al., 2003; Redford & Stearman, 1993; Van Cott, 1994; Lu, 2007).

This criticism points to an important limitation of the two frameworks in terms of the scope of their application. Most importantly, it implies that when indigenous people do not share the reversed 'hierarchy of needs' postulated by both frameworks, an MCA could result in compromises over the terms of oil extraction between indigenous people and oil companies. Obviously, that people do not privilege their environmental values over many others does not necessarily entail that environmental damage does not constitute an incommensurable loss for them, in terms of their livelihoods and cultural identity. It follows that while the recognition of the 'mixed values' of indigenous people is arguably a necessary starting point to see them as something more than the passive recipients of externally imposed change, modernity and development (Bessire, 2014; Cameron, 2010; Cepek, 2011; Freeman, 2002; Gray, 1997; Sahlins, 1999), it raises more questions than it answers. In particular, how do indigenous people with mixed worldviews and multiple values (i.e. cultural 'difference' mixed with 'equality' aspirations) assess and respond to 'change' when it comes in the form of modernisation projects entailing incommensurable and contradictory dimensions for valuation (in particular: when 'difference' is denied in the provision of 'equality')? What does it mean, in such cases, to

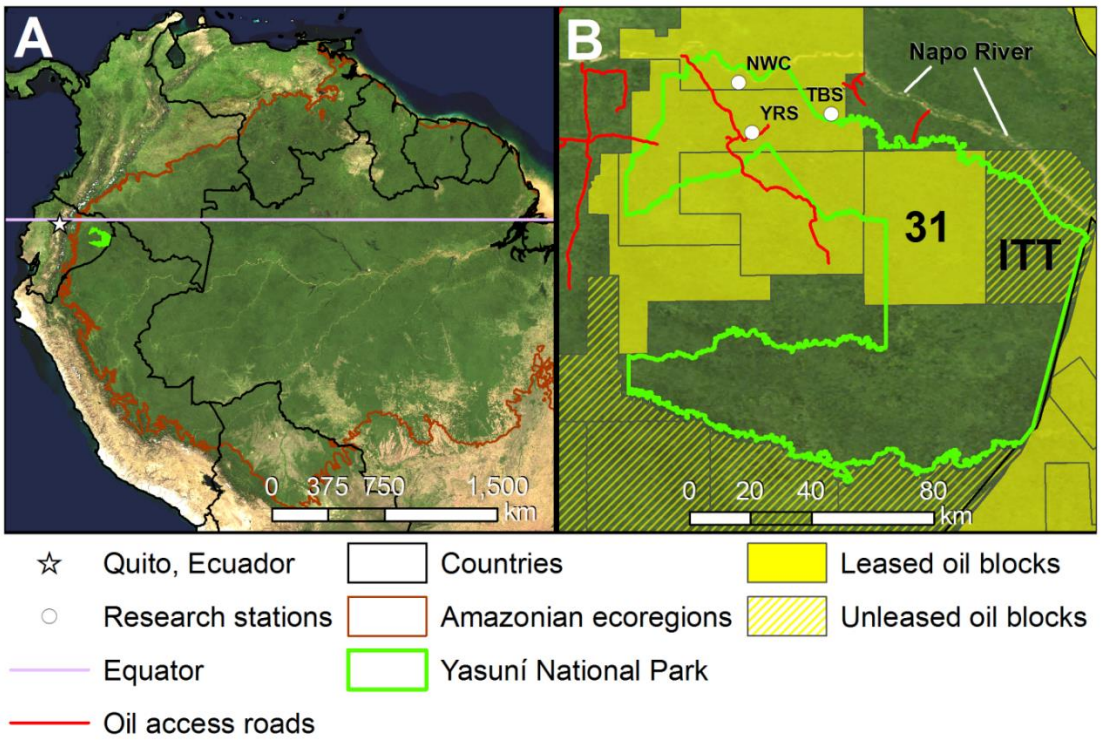
embrace, or simply not to resist change? How do indigenous people make decisions in the presence of incommensurability of values and on which grounds, and how do they struggle with those choices? In turn, what are the implications for the ability of MCA to take different languages of valuation into account and ultimately make more sustainable decisions? The counternarrative does not tackle the question of incommensurability of values and as such, the critiques of political ecology systematically avoid tackling the important questions which naturally arise from such recognition. As a result, both narratives underestimate the struggles faced by indigenous people with mixed values and for whom oil extraction entails a trade-off between incommensurable local outcomes.

The context (Ecuador)

Ecuador provides a unique setting to analyse the claims of indigenous people towards oil extraction. The Correa administration, in power between 2006 and 2017, was particularly innovative in the recognition of the incommensurability between environmental protection, indigenous rights and economic resources. The Constitution, built around the concept of '*sumak kawsay*', Quichua word for well-being (Lalander & Peralta, 2012), recognises the plurinationality of the Ecuadorian State and the rights of indigenous people. Most dramatically, it gives rights to Nature and states that "no amount of any other good or service can compensate for the loss of the Rights of Nature" (Rodríguez-Labajos & Martínez-Alier, 2013: 339). For Escobar, rights to nature and the concept of *buen vivir* are based on ideas that do not fit the "environmental political correctness" and "the philosophical structure of modern constitution, within which nature is seen as an inert object for humans to appropriate" (2011a: xxviii). Together with the Constitution of Bolivia, it was described as the most radical constitutional text in the world in relation to the provision of legal protection of nature (Lalander & Peralta, 2012). Such recognition is also embodied in the Yasuní-ITT initiative. Launched in 2007, it proposed to leave 20 per cent of the country's oil reserves permanently underground in the

Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) fields of the Yasuní National Park (YNP), declared "Man and Biosphere Reserve" of the UNESCO in 1989, and home to indigenous people, among which two groups in voluntary isolation – the Tagaeri and Taromenane (Finer et al., 2008). The initiative would avoid the emission of 407 million tons of CO2 (Larrea, 2014b), protect the biodiversity of "one of the most biologically diverse areas on the planet" (Acosta, Gudynas, Martínez, & Vogel, 2009: 4) and the rights of indigenous people living inside. By asking a monetary compensation to the international community for the avoided emissions, it brought "into focus a classic dilemma between extraction by a state that needs economic resources versus the conservation of global public goods and the rights of indigenous people" (Pellegrini, Arsel, Falconí, & Muradian, 2013: 3).

Figure 1: Oil extraction in the YNP



Source: Bass, Finer et al. (2010)

But neither the acknowledgements of the contradictions between oil development and the protection of the environment, nor the recognition of incommensurability, solved the dilemmas

of the Ecuadorian State. Because the compensation demanded to the international community had not been raised, oil extraction was finally allowed in the ITT fields of the YNP, in 2013. The discourse of the Ecuadorian government shifted to present oil extraction as the promise of decreasing poverty in the Amazon, through the implementation of a complex scheme of economic and social redistribution for local indigenous communities. By doing so, the state challenged the very idea of incommensurability, institutionalised through the Constitution. For many commentators, the end of the initiative marked a rupture between Correa and the indigenous movement (Bebbington, 2009; Bebbington, 2011; Jameson, 2011; Lalander & Peralta, 2012). But at the local level, indigenous communities responded favourably to one of the first processes of prior consultation ever led in the country (Vallejo, 2014). In the ITT fields, the process was carried out in 2013 and the first barrels were extracted in 2016.

The thesis

Purpose and argument

The thesis aims to reconceptualise the frameworks of oil conflicts in political ecology, in the light of the important criticism raised by the counternarrative, as a way to enrich the search for alternatives which is at the core of the project of ecological economics. It does so by investigating the acceptance of the ITT oil project by the Quichua communities of the Lower Napo River, in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and the consequences of such a project on people and territories – with a focus on uses and values of the environment as a source of livelihood and cultural identity (the river, the forest and the land in particular). I analyse the penetration of oil in the *ribera*[6] ethnographically and across time and space, by travelling between different Quichua communities of the same river at different stages of the oil extraction project. This allows the empirical story to describe, chapter by chapter and step by step (chronological), the inevitability of both oil penetration and the process of development it comes with, in tension

[6] Name given to the Lower Napo River and the Quichua communities surrounding it.

with traditional subsistence livelihoods, despite the conflicts and struggles that each stage of incorporation triggers and ultimately leading to the weakening of already-weakened subsistence economies and an ecological crisis at the local scale of the *ribera*.

The thesis shows that if oil represents a dilemma between 'difference' and 'equality' it is a rather asymmetric one where oil comes to further already existing 'impacts' while providing the communities with 'solutions' for the consequences on people's livelihoods of both the new and existing impacts on the river – in addition to money, jobs and other 'benefits' which are considered to be lacking and necessary prior to the entrance of the company. On the other hand, the benefits from oil are often the main trigger of ecological and cultural change in the communities, indirectly and in the long term, starting with drinking water provision and wage labour which tend to disconnect people from nature in time, space and values, in addition to the direct pollution from the oil project. From an MCA perspective, the thesis agues that because 1) valuation at one point in time is not the mere translation of values (but includes considerations of context and timeline), and 2) people's values (notably their ecological and cultural 'difference') are not fixed but constantly shaped and negotiated in the process of change, MCAs might not give the answer expected by political ecology in this context and oil extraction, rather than create conflict, might result in non-conflictive yet problematic situations.

All in all, this dynamic investigation of oil in space and time allows to see that oil comes to accelerate a process of change (economic, ecological and cultural) already at play in the communities, by providing the inhabitants with the benefits they increasingly need and desire as a result of that very process of change. It sheds light, in that vein, on the structural mechanisms behind the inevitable acceptance of the oil project (and the process of development it comes with) by the communities – while highlighting the valuation struggles entailed in such decisions (which are made visible through the heterogeneity, ambivalences and coexistence of desire and resistance within the communities), at each stage of the process, and the

consequences on peoples and territories, without dismissing people's agency in the decision-making process. The valuation struggles of the inhabitants in the face of oil extraction are ultimately symptomatic of wider struggles, in the face of development which, in its modernist and capitalistic expression, is systematically in tension with ecological and cultural 'difference'. The thesis thus ultimately argues that the solution to those struggles cannot solely lie in the use of new decision-making tools (such as MCAs) which would allow a 'better' choice between various alternatives which are not satisfactory anyway. The challenge lies, instead, in the design of alternatives to development which would go beyond recurrent dilemma between 'difference' (the preservation of culture and the environment) and 'equality' (development), systematically faced not only by a growing number of indigenous people around the world but by the human species as a whole, in the context of an unprecedented ecological crisis.

Thesis outline

The thesis is based on an eight-month period of fieldwork conducted between August 2016 and March 2017, which resulted in some 400 conversations and interviews with the Quichua and *mestizo*[7] inhabitants of the Lower Napo River, state officials (local and national), oil workers, academics, as well as notes on my observations and reflections, official documents and surveys. It is structured as follows.

Theory chapter

In a first chapter, theoretical, I present the two types of conflicts developed by Martinez-Alier and Escobar as ecological and cultural distribution conflicts. I show why these conflicts call for alternative tools for decision making, and how and why MCAs are supposed create debates and challenge the way decisions are made. In this chapter, I also highlight the limits of the conception of indigenous people underlined through these frameworks. I introduce an

[7] *Mestizo/a* is usually used for people of combined European and indigenous descent. In the Lower Napo River, it refers to anyone who is not indigenous and comes from another part of the country.

Ecuadorian counternarrative and explain how, by recognising the mixed values of indigenous people, it allows explaining acceptance (and compromises between indigenous people, oil companies and states), without denying people's agency. I then review a broader and older literature around values and change in anthropology and political economy which results, in its different versions, in a recognition of the people's mixed values as a foundation to explain positive responses to change, modernity and development. I finally argue that such recognition raises more questions than it answers, when recast in a political ecology language (with its emphasis on incommensurability of values) and in the context of oil extraction. I introduce those questions, explain why the counternarrative, in all its different forms, does not tackle them and finally explain how I try and answer them in the rest of the thesis.

History chapter

In the second chapter I show the significance of the question in a country like Ecuador where theories of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts have been deployed, instrumentalised and finally called into question by the Ecuadorian counternarrative. I put such interpretations in historical and political perspective and retrace the history of the Ecuadorian oil conflict between indigenous people, oil companies and the Ecuadorian State in five stages, from unregulated and uncompensated oil development in the 1960s to the Correa administration (2006-2017) which responded, across two chronological stages, to the ecological and cultural demands of the indigenous movement and the social demands of indigenous communities. I argue that the question of how and why indigenous people accept oil compromises in their territories is still open in contemporary Ecuador and is of utter importance in a context where the rights to prior consultation could legitimise oil extraction in indigenous territories.

Methodology chapter

I expose my case study methodology in a third chapter. I explain how I increasingly came to realise, while doing fieldwork, that oil decisions among the Quichua inhabitants of the Lower

Napo River could not be understood independently from the much broader process of ecological, cultural and socio-economic change at play in the *ribera* in which those decisions are embedded. I describe how this realisation slowly translated into a creative research design, as the study of oil decisions became more and more indirect and concrete and my methods increasingly ethnographic. I finally justify my choice of investigating oil decisions and valuation in different communities at different stages of integration into the oil extraction process, how this helped me investigate oil decisions, oil struggles and oil development chronologically (by travelling up and down the river) and organise the empirical story in chronological order: before, during and after oil decisions were made in the communities.

Empirical chapters

In the fourth chapter, I analyse the changing relationship of the inhabitants with the environment (the river, the forest and the *finca*[8]) as a source of livelihood and cultural identity in the communities of the Lower Napo River. I show that growing pressures on the subsistence economy in the communities, prior to the entrance of the oil company (increased scarcity in nature due to the pollution of the river, disappearance of the animals and controls from the state on hunting and fishing and cutting down wood) coupled with the inhabitants' changing considerations and aspirations (for ease, duration and status in particular) mean that nature, although it is still a source of livelihood and cultural identity in the communities, is no longer sufficient for people to meet their needs. Those are increasingly expressed in socio-economic terms and are expected to be met by individual money and state provision. The state's insufficient response coupled with the lack of economic resources result in a situation of scarcity, unfulfilled needs and a demand for change – in the context of an evolving perception of poverty which is increasingly equated with subsistence livelihoods by the inhabitants

[8] The *finca* includes the Quichua house and the chakra [farm], which includes both cultivations and animals. Every family normally has one and they usually grow yucca and plantain. It can translate as farm or plot.

themselves and reframed as lack of money and jobs. Both can come with oil extraction and the chapter sets the stage for the acceptance of the oil project in the next chapter.

In the fifth chapter, oil comes to respond to people's need for money and jobs, while furthering the ecological damage on the river and forest and creating new damage on the *finca* – with expected impacts on people's livelihoods; more particularly on their water and food provision and their health. While the river is already polluted and the forest already 'damaged' (as detailed in the previous chapter), the largest impacts on the river, forest and *finca* are expected in the long term, when people argue they could move to another part of the territory to recreate the subsistence economy somewhere else. Moreover, because the oil project enters little by little in the river, further affecting the area environmentally before providing people with their socio-economic demands, the expected impacts are a given for the communities of the lower part of the river, while the benefits are tied to the acceptance of the oil project in their specific territory. Finally, oil comes with solutions for both the expected and existing pollution of the river, by providing drinking water to the communities inside the oil project – the consequences of which will be analysed in the three following chapters. All in all the chapter describes the asymmetry of the oil 'dilemma', therefore explaining the inevitability of acceptance of the oil project by the communities (in spite of the environmental impacts it comes with, while setting the stage for further change (and valuation struggles) in the subsequent stages (and chapters).

The sixth chapter analyses an ongoing conflict between the Municipality and the inhabitants of Samona (the first community in the river to benefit from a drinking water plant as part of the 'social compensation' from the oil project), revolving around the monthly payment which comes with the provision of drinking water to their community. While the drinking water plant is perceived by the inhabitants as both necessary (due to the pollution of the river) and desired, they refuse to pay for the water – which they consider is a right and should be free. They are not short of arguments: the plant and the water are theirs, drinking water is a competency of

the Municipality, the water was given as part of the social compensation from oil which comes to pollute the river, indigenous people should not pay for basic services, there was no consultation, the neighbouring community is not paying for the water, they do not have the money to pay, and money is not to pay for water anyway. The chapter investigates the claims of the inhabitants against the idea of paying for the water, in all their dimensions (cultural, political and economic), highlights the heterogeneity and coexistence of different responses to such idea in the community, and analyses the ways in which people's claims, perceptions and responses are reframed, throughout the conflict and along the Napo River – in the lower part of which the inhabitants, who are given jobs at the same time as they are provided with different 'basic services', consider it is normal to pay for the services as long as one has a job. The conflict, thus reframed – a technical issue (lack of steady income) – will most likely be 'solved' by the provision of jobs to the inhabitants by the same oil company and result (in the following chapters of the thesis) in the weakening of an already weakened subsistence economy. The chapter is, in itself, another illustration of the inevitability of change, despite the struggles and tensions change comes with. More importantly, it sets the stage for the fourth empirical chapter where further change arises as the inhabitants start working for the company.

The seventh chapter closes the empirical story (in four stages) by investigating the tensions between wage labour (in the oil company) and the Quichua life in the communities – with a focus on the subsistence economy and communitarian organisation. It describes how jobs, which are initially desired by the inhabitants as a way to compliment the subsistence economy, increasingly lead to the neglect of the *finca*, but also subsistence and communitarian activities, thus furthering the disconnection between people and nature and between people. Disconnection becomes partly endogenous as people's valuation of the *finca,* as a place and an activity, evolves. It finally translates into a crisis when, after some years of seismic activities, the oil company no longer needs unqualified workers from the communities, leaving the

inhabitants with more unfulfilled needs and an ever-weakened subsistence economy – a point at which some inhabitants contemplate the possibility of migrating to the city and find a job. The chapter shows that oil only comes to accelerate a process of change already at play in the communities, by providing the inhabitants with what they consider they need (job and money) prior to the entrance of the oil project. In other words, it describes oil as a provider of development, itself damaging of nature and people. From an MCA perspective, the chapter shows that the main impacts from oil arise indirectly in the medium and long term and come from the benefits from oil. As such, the chapter introduces the question of the broader quest for 'equality' and modernity, which in the *ribera* (as in many other places around the world) leads the inhabitants to act in favour of an ecologically destructive project and against their own cultural 'difference' through their responses to the *consulta previa* [prior consultation].

The eight chapter goes further than the previous one in the analysis of the development process and investigates people's perception of life in the city and the village, as opposed to life in the community – in a context where the Municipality plans to gather the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar in the centre of their community, far from the *finca*, in order to decrease the costs of electricity provision. The chapter highlights the heterogeneities and ambivalences which are found in the communities in the face of such a prospect. They are telling of the remaining and changing values of the *finca* – in a context where the connection with the *finca* is directly threatened (in space) by the prospect of 'gathering'. It concludes with some considerations of the future of the communities in an oil development context and shows that the challenge is to design alternatives beyond the recurrent dilemma between 'difference' and 'equality' which is at the heart not only of the oil extraction project but all the stages of the capitalist and modern development it inevitably comes with. This last empirical chapter confirms many points addressed in the previous chapters and acts as a summary of the empirical story. In particular, it comes as another illustration of the inevitable disconnection from nature (in time and space),

in the name of development (in this case access to electricity) and despite the struggles such disconnection triggers – ultimately leading to a local crisis and a situation of poverty.

Conclusions

I reconceptualise the frameworks of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts in the light of my empirical story in the conclusions. I show how the investigation of oil decisions in time and space allows understanding the responses and struggles of indigenous people who, despite a special attachment to the environment as a source of livelihood and cultural identity, incommensurable with money, have accepted an environmentally disrupting project in their territory in the name of 'equality' and against their own cultural 'difference'. I show, in turn, how such understanding can illuminate our conception of 'difference' (as contextual rather than tied to groups of people, and as threatened), but also resistance, compromise, and sustainability. I derive policy implications as well as implications in terms of the search for solutions to the ecological crisis which is at the heart of the project of ecological economics.

Chapter 1. Indigenous people's values, oil conflicts (political ecology) and multi-criteria analysis (ecological economics): theoretical framework and review of the literature

Introduction

The literature on extractivism has focused on conflict and the main theories of oil conflicts come from political ecology. Defined by Martinez-Alier (2002) and Escobar (2008) as ecological and cultural distribution conflicts, they postulate that indigenous people, because of their ecological and cultural 'difference' (Escobar, 2008) – a special attachment to the environment as a provider of livelihood or cultural identity – oppose oil extraction projects which threaten these environments. Ecological and cultural distribution conflicts are conflicts over the meaning assigned to Nature by different groups in society. While some values are currently hidden behind the hegemony of mainstream decision tools such as cost-benefit analyses (CBAs), multi-criteria analyses (MCAs) allow taking into account the plurality of values inherent in any policy decision while recognising that they cannot be compared using "a common unit of measurement" (Martinez-Alier et al., 1998). MCAs thus seem particularly appropriated to address such conflicts. They have the potential to reverse ecologically unsustainable policy decisions, notably extractive ones, through discussion and debate over the relative importance to give to each criterion (Munda, 2004). While the frameworks were influential in the study of Latin American indigenous movements (Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010) and the Ecuadorian oil conflict more particularly (details in chapter 2), they cannot fully make sense of the struggles of indigenous people whose heterogeneous claims were sometimes accommodated through the material and social compensation brought by large oil companies to their territories. According to a certain Ecuadorian counternarrative (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013), political ecology tends to essentialise the claims of indigenous people which are not only ecological and cultural, but economic, social, political and ethic (Fontaine, 2004). Because it typically leaves aside the concept of incommensurability of values, however, the

counternarrative does not address the question of the valuation struggles entailed in decisions regarding projects with incommensurable and contradictory dimensions for valuation (such as oil extraction which comes with both environmental damage and a 'social compensation'), and the consequences of such decisions on peoples and their territories, for indigenous people with 'mixed values'. Yet such questions are important to assess the ability of MCA to take different languages of valuation into account and, ultimately, make ecologically sustainable decisions.

This chapter's purpose is to describe, analyse and critically assess the frameworks of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts, developed by Martinez-Alier and Escobar respectively in the field of political ecology to explain the opposition of indigenous groups to environmentally disruptive projects in their territories, and the resulting proposal of ecological economics to use MCA as a tool to make more environmentally sustainable decisions. It presents the broader debate around indigenous people's values and valuation of extractivism, development and change, introduces 'counternarratives' and raises new questions from these contributions – which my thesis seeks to address. It is organised into four sections. In the first section, I introduce the two frameworks, review their underlying assumptions and proposed solutions. I explain why they cannot fully make sense of conflict and why they cannot explain compromises. I show, in a second section, that variants of political ecology which seek to explain compromise tend to frame it as a 'non-choice'. I introduce, alternatively, a counternarrative which brings back agency in the analysis of compromises, by recognising the 'mixed values' of indigenous people. I review, in a third section, the broader (and older) debate around indigenous people's values and resulting perception of change, in political economy and anthropology. I derive new questions arising from such debate and argue, in a fourth section, that a real understanding of compromise requires a shift in focus, from the responses to the struggles (and valuation struggles) of indigenous people in the face of change (in this case oil extraction). I finally explain how I investigate these struggles in the thesis.

1. Oil conflicts: A political ecology framework and an Ecuadorian counter-illustration

Ecological and cultural distribution conflicts

Martinez-Alier defines ecological distribution conflicts as "conflicts on the social, spatial, temporal inequalities in the use of natural resources and services and in the burden of pollution" (Martinez-Alier, 1995). While the environment obviously provides the raw materials for consumption, in rich countries in particular – notably through the extraction of non-renewable resources – it provides essential services necessary for the livelihood of poor people (2002: 119). The destruction of the environment is, if not a post-material concern, a direct threat for them (2002: 253). Oil extraction, as well as other extractive and polluting projects, represents such threat: polluted air and water directly impact the means of subsistence of people and animals, thus their livelihoods (Bebbington, 2011) and might result in health problems and even physical genocide (Howitt, 2001). Therefore, poor local people are often on the side of environmental conservation. Martinez-Alier labels these movements 'environmentalism of the poor' (2002), which he defines as "the activism of poor women and men threatened by the loss of the environmental resources and services they need for livelihood" (2002: 119). Through these movements, they defend their livelihoods but more broadly their human rights, "since it is impossible to separate Nature from human livelihood, and livelihood from human rights" (2002: 108).

Escobar, who sees "issues of access and control of natural resources" as central to many of today's conflicts, goes further in his conception of the relationship between indigenous people and the environment, by insisting on the cultural meaning associated with certain uses of the environment for livelihood (Descola & Pálsson, 1996; Escobar, 2006a; Gudeman & Rivera, 1990). For him, the struggle of poor people witnessed by Martinez-Alier is also cultural. Through their movements, indigenous people defend an entire 'life project' which embeds their cultural 'difference' (Escobar, 2008: 305), or in other words, their ecological, economic and

cultural practices (Escobar, 2006a: 130). ‘Life projects’ are defined as being “about living a purposeful and meaningful life” (Blaser, Feit, & McRae, 2004: 30). They are embodied in territory (Escobar, 2001); hence the cultural attachment of indigenous people to place (Escobar, 1999; Escobar, 2006a; Escobar, 2008). Where Martinez-Alier sees an ‘environmentalism of the poor’, Escobar sees “place-based struggles for economic, ecological and cultural difference” (Escobar, 2008: 16).

Both conceptions challenge and reconcile two widespread ideas: indigenous people as conservationists (Aagesen, 1998), on the one hand, and the poor as ‘too poor to be green’ (Martinez-Alier, 1995) on the other – encapsulated in Hobsbawm‘s statement that “the poor, multiplying and under-employed, wanted more development, not less” (1979). The people described by Martinez-Alier and Escobar are not conservationists by nature (Bernhardson, 1986; Posey, 1985; Posey, 2000), and they are not the “Noble Savage” denounced by Redford (Redford, 1991; Redford & Stearman, 1993). Instead, as in Alcorn, the preservation of the environment is for them “just part of making a living” (1993: 425). They are ‘environmentalists’, and their environmentalism is not a post-materialist value (Inglehart, 1971; 1977; 1990), but a material or cultural necessity. A recurrent example of ecological distribution conflict in Martinez-Alier’s writings arises over shrimp farming, in many countries of Latin America (among which Ecuador). It opposes poor people who use the mangrove wood to make a living, and shrimp farming industries, which destroy the mangroves. Escobar’s most frequent case study is the black and indigenous social movement in the Colombian Pacific, through which indigenous people defend their “traditional production systems” (Escobar, 2008: 8) against African oil palm industries which threaten to displace them, thus denying their economic, ecological and cultural ‘difference’.

Incommensurability, power, and weak interpretation of sustainability

Incommensurability and power are at the core of both analyses (Escobar, 1998; Martinez-Alier, 1995). For Martinez-Alier, ecological distribution conflicts reflect 'value system contests', or in other words, clashes of incommensurable standards of value" (2002: 150), because such values cannot be compared on a unique scale of measurement: it is impossible to put a price on "the ecological value of ecosystems, the respect for sacredness, the urgency of livelihood (…)" (Martinez-Alier, 2002: 150). The incommensurability between economy and ecology is widened in Escobar's view: he sees it "as arising from the contrasting cultural meanings assigned to nature by various human groups" (2006a: 124). The environment as a source of cultural identity cannot be compensated by money. An important implication of both frameworks is that monetary compensation cannot solve the conflicts. In fact, efforts to find appropriate compensation "test the limits of current social science and institutional arrangements to identify and deliver an equitable solution to resource damages that result in culture loss" (Snyder, Williams, & Peterson, 2003: 108).

The two frameworks are part of the current of political ecology, an interdisciplinary field born in the 1980s out of the failure of 'sustainable development' to address environmental problems (Bryant, 1998). They embody a critique of what their authors see as a 'weak[9]' interpretation of sustainability, which considers environmental problems as externalities which could be internalised through the creation of environmental markets and the assignation of property rights (Escobar, 1995; Escobar, 1998; Escobar, 1999; Martinez-Alier, 1995; Martinez-Alier, 2002); as it has been the preferred approach of the sustainable development consensus since the Bruntland report (Bernstein, 2002). Such enterprise, in their view, favours one 'language of valuation' (Martinez-Alier, 1995), often monetary, over many other possible languages, such as livelihood and cultural identity. It favours one 'norm', embedded in the assumption of strong

[9] See footnote 3 (page 2).

comparability of values, over many other norms, such as incommensurability of values. As such, it favours some groups in society (Munda, 2004), by giving them the power to define "the terms and values that regulate social life concerning economy, ecology, personhood, body, knowledge, property, and so forth" (Escobar, 2006a: 124). Indeed, languages of valuation and culture are associated with social power, in a given historical context (Escobar, 1995).

Where Martinez-Alier asks who "has the power to simplify complexity, ruling some languages of valuation out of order" (2002: 271), Escobar asks: "Whose knowledge counts? And what does this have to do with place, culture and power?" (Escobar, 2008: 4). For both authors, the answer is often capital and the state (Escobar, 2008: 1; Martinez-Alier, 1994: 326)[10].

Conflict resolution and MCA (the solution of ecological economics)

Cost-benefit analyses (CBA), the most commonly used decision-making tool derived from that conception, are illustrative of that failure (Munda, 1996). The tool, based on a monetary language of valuation only, leaves other languages of valuation out of the discussion. By doing so, it often helps legitimising ecologically unsustainable projects. Ecological and cultural distribution conflicts point to the need to reembed economic decisions in ecological and cultural considerations (Escobar, 2008), in order to find alternative, more sustainable, paths of development. ecological economics proposes a concrete solution to do so, through the creation of alternative decision-making tools which would allow moving "beyond the obsession of "taking nature into account" in money terms" (Martinez-Alier, 2002: 2). Multi-criteria analyses (MCA) are such tools. An MCA problem is characterised by a set of alternatives – for instance, extracting oil or not – and a set of criteria for evaluation – which can be economic, cultural, ecological, political, and so forth. The alternatives are then compared on each criterion

[10] This is obviously not an isolated stance: in the same vein, Watene and Yap argue that because of the absence of cultural considerations in the Sustainable Development goals (in this case set by the Australian government), "the dominant paradigm of goal setting, data collection and measurement – in its universal applicability – lets indigenous contributions fall out of the discussion" (2015: 53)

separately. Thus, MCA can take into account many dimensions of a problem in the decision-making process (Martinez-Alier et al., 2001) and the fact that they cannot be compared on "a common unit of measurement" (Martinez-Alier et al., 1998: 282).

As it can be expected from a tool which takes incommensurability into account, MCA are mathematically ill-defined. The most common aggregation procedure to make a decision through MCA is to assign weights to the different dimensions of the problem (Gamper & Turcanu, 2007: 300), which can have different interpretations, from substitutability to relative importance (Polatidis et al., 2006). One basic assumption of ecological economics is that "to weight different criteria implies to give weights to different groups in society" (Munda, 2004: 672). Thus, when the choice over the weights is not left to the liberty of the decision-maker, different groups will have different stances on the weights to be assigned and this process is often insufficient to make a decision (Martinez-Alier et al., 1998). This is why MCAs ultimately have to be defined politically: they are supposed to create a democratic process of discussion, debate and conflict between the different stakeholders over the relative importance of the different dimensions of the choice (Munda, 2004), in order to reach "a political compromise" (Gamper & Turcanu, 2007: 300). In practice, they require building the decision-making process on questionnaires, focus groups and interviews with a variety of actors (Munda, 2004).

MCA seem particularly suited to the resolution of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts, arising between indigenous people, on the side of environmental conservation because of their ecological and cultural difference (Escobar, 2008; Martinez-Alier, 2002), and states which rely on oil extraction for the development of their economies. The use of MCA, in those cases, is expected to counterbalance the power asymmetries between indigenous people, on the one hand, and states and extractive industries, on the other hand, by taking the ecological and cultural claims of the former (and the cultural and ecological losses they suffer), into account

in the decision process – without reducing them to their monetary value. As such, they also have the potential to reverse ecologically unsustainable decisions, notably extractive ones.

A standard narrative? An Ecuadorian counter-illustration

The two frameworks were widely deployed in the analysis of Latin American social movements (Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010). In Ecuador, they were used to describe the oil conflict arising from the 1990s, between a powerful indigenous movement (Jameson, 2011) and multinational oil companies operating in the Amazon[11]. But the underlying conception of indigenous people derived through these frameworks has also raised significant criticism. In Ecuador in particular, local variants of the frameworks[12] were accused of essentialising the claims of indigenous people. By depicting them as conservationists (Valdivia, 2005) and against all kind of development (Sabin, 1998), and by portraying oil conflicts as "absolute battles between romanticized subsistence cultures and demonized market cultures" (Sabin, 1998: 162), this 'standard narrative' (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013) "underscores the struggle of native communities to change how oil extraction occurs" (Sabin, 1998: 145) – according to its critiques. Their criticism is well illustrated by a famous oil conflict in Ecuador, opposing the Organization of Indigenous People of Pastaza (OPIP) to Italian oil firm ARCO in 1992. Created in 1978 to confront colonization and stop oil development, OPIP was described as "the most radical and best-organized of the provincial organizations" of Ecuador (Sabin, 1998: 160). The fight of OPIP revolved around "territorial, cultural and environmental control and protection" (Sawyer, 2004: 76): "OPIP community members and federation leaders vociferously challenged petroleum exploitation in their lands – condemning what they considered to be ARCO's insidious instrumentality and manipulative method" (Sawyer, 2004:

[11] This is developed in the second, history chapter.

[12] Such local variants are often romanticised versions of the theories. The implications, however, are merely the same: indigenous people are against oil extraction and they do not ask for a fair compensation but for the protection of the environment, which is part of their cultural identity. Moreover, both Martinez-Alier and Escobar explicitly applied their frameworks to the Ecuadorian oil conflict – as described in the next, history chapter.

10). In a letter to ARCO's chief executive in Los Angeles, OPIP wrote: "we are not willing to succumb to the same fate as those to the North who have suffered profound ills… in the name of 'progress', 'development' and 'modernization'" (Sawyer, 2004: 71). OPIP was, in its discourse, a perfect example of ecological and cultural distribution conflict – defending both territory and the environment against the oil industry. But, Sawyer argues, none of the indigenous people of OPIP was against oil extraction per se. She makes apparent the complexities and the heterogeneity of indigenous claims, encapsulated in apparently contradictory stances, such as the words of Hector Villamil, one of OPIP's leaders in 1993, and the ones of an indigenous woman during OPIP's third march in 1997:

> "A flisly communal hall, an empty health center, a volleyball field, sheets of tin [roofing], and a company cap? Crumbs, just crumbs. … OPIP wants to push for real development" (Sawyer, 2004: 57).

> "We don't want any agreement. We don't want crumbs. We don't want leftovers. We are sick and tired of this. The *indígena* is always deceived with a sack of rice by leaders whose consciences have been bought" (Sawyer, 2004: 218).

The communities had not been consulted or well-informed, nor did they really benefit from oil extraction. They maintained "an ambivalent relationship with oil operations… in the ideal world, OPIP would like to benefit from oil if it did not compromise *indígenas'* independence and monitoring" (Sawyer, 2004: 64), and to participate in the economic benefits – demanding $2 per barrel extracted (Sabin, 1998). As the example of OPIP suggests, the frameworks of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts cannot fully account for the opposition of indigenous people to oil extraction projects in Ecuador. More generally, an obvious limitation of the frameworks lies in their inability to make sense of the many and increasingly numerous situations where oil extraction and other environmentally destructive projects result in

compromises rather than conflict. In Ecuador, notably, they cannot help fully understanding the struggle of local indigenous people, whose heterogeneous claims were sometimes accommodated through the material and social compensation brought by large oil companies to their territories[13] (Sabin, 1998; Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013; Fontaine, 2004a, 2009a).

2. Understanding compromise – between agency and constraint

Variants of political ecology and compromise (and change) as a non-choice

As situations of compromises between indigenous people and the oil companies operating in their territories became increasingly frequent historically (and in Ecuador), a number of empirical accounts widened the scope of political ecology by focusing on the different strategies of manipulation of marginalised people by powerful agents, such as large firms and states, to deal with social conflicts. In such accounts, while large development projects, including oil extraction, are damaging for indigenous peoples and culture – notably their ecological, cultural and economic 'difference' (Escobar, 2008) – and while the social compensation cannot compensate for these impacts, indigenous people might accept oil extraction in their territories as the result of the power imbalances between the different actors in the conflict. These accounts generally focus on ill-information, misunderstanding and misperception of the impacts by the local communities (see for instance Lora-Wainwright, 2013), the lack of power (to say no or resist), the poverty and lack of alternatives of the inhabitants to obtain necessary benefits for their very subsistence (see Stonich, 1993) – in a context where large firms become the only providers of various material and economic benefits for the local communities – and even the ability of the state to shape the desires of indigenous people – through Foucault's 'governmentality' (see Li, 1999; 2007). In Ecuador, studies show that the structures and relations of dependency with the communities created by the company shape in many ways the acceptance of indigenous people (Martinez Sastre, 2014; Vallejo,

[13] Many such examples are provided in the next, history chapter.

2014). For instance, Vallejo (2014) describes the local communities as ill-informed and manipulated by the government: she shows that people have been told (during the *consulta previa*) that there would not be pollution and what they could do in case it happens (2014: 125). According to a study by Becerra, Paichard et al. (2013) the poverty and lack of economic alternatives of the inhabitants of Dayuma – due to their geographic isolation from any other activity – prevents them from claiming their environmental rights. In some cases, they argue, the same dependency influences perceptions and people simply do not see the environmental and health impacts, or do not attribute them to oil extraction. In the OPIP's case against ARCO, in block 10, Sawyer (2004) puts in perspective the fight of the OPIP organisation with the acceptance of some near communities, members of a new Quichua organisation, DICIP. She describes the indigenous people in favour of oil extraction as "the most materially poor and politically marginalized people in Pastaza" (2004: 8), defending oil extraction out of the "illusions of betterment that ARCO's omnipotent and benevolent hand promised" (2004: 8).

These accounts mainly ask normative questions – as political ecology does – and their focus is rarely on understanding the decision-making process of the local people. Instead they seek to critically assess large development projects[14], together with the strategies of powerful actors to impose these projects on the local inhabitants and their impacts at the local level. Such accounts are very useful in terms of this normative goal. Moreover, contrary to the two main frameworks developed in political ecology, they [their focus on the power dimension] allow[s] explaining acceptance. But they cannot do so without denying, to a certain extent, the agency of indigenous people: people accept because they have no choice, because they do not know what they are accepting, or because they think it is good for them but are mistaken. While such a view might partly be accurate in many cases, it may also arguably miss part of the picture.

[14] See also Gilberthorpe, 2006; Gilberthorpe & Banks, 2012; Gilberthorpe, 2013 for a criticism of the social corporate responsibility (with a focus on Papua New Guinea).

Bringing back agency: an Ecuadorian counternarrative

The critiques of political ecology, instead, usually start with the recognition of two facts: (1) life in the communities in the absence of oil extraction should not be romanticised: it is mostly characterised by poverty, material deprivation and the absence of a state, notably at the local level (see Perreault, 2001; 2003), and (2) indigenous people's claims embody not only ecological and cultural dimensions, but "multiple and often coexisting motivations" (Bebbington, 2011: 223) which are political, economic, social and ethic (Fontaine, 2004b). Their demands go, together with environmental claims, from jobs and productive activities and the support in integration to the regional and national market to the right to consultation and participation. Their struggles are about trying to "control the modalities of their economic and social development" (Fontaine, 2004a: 10). From that point, they seek to understand the diversity of actors in the conflict and the diversity of their claims (Fontaine, 2004a): they widen what we could call 'economic distribution conflicts', in which what is at stake is the unequal distribution of material resources (Escobar, 2006a: 122), to include the various claims of indigenous people without limiting them to ecological and cultural ones. In particular, the value of different aspects of modern development is often emphasised. Valdivia (2005), for instance, suggests that the acceptance of oil extraction does not only reflect the lack of economic resources in the communities but the idea of a more profound change, related to the value assigned to 'modernization'[15]. From there, the counternarrative concludes that (3) the interests of the state, oil industries and indigenous people are not necessarily contradictory (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013) – some of the claims of indigenous people can be accommodated through the 'social corporate responsibility' of large oil companies, and empirical evidence shows that

[15] See also Rival (2002) for the value of school among Huaorani communities in Ecuador; Urteaga- Crovetto (2012) for the notion of 'progress' and its links to consumption, education and health in Bolivia and Vallejo (2014) for the value of development among indigenous communities in Ecuador.

agreements were found punctually between oil industries and local indigenous communities[16] – (4) which is a starting point to approach the decision of letting the oil activities enter one's territory as a rational one.

Indigenous people, in their view, are not anti-extractivist but against the way oil extraction is managed. Thus, when they are in favour of oil extraction, these accounts refuse the view that indigenous people are merely manipulated. For Sabin (1998), the choice of oil extraction results from a rational decision-making process – which he frames as an economic and cultural CBA: The Siona-Secoya living in Cuyabeno National Park, and the Cofán of Siabalo firmly opposed oil extraction because they had an alternative source of revenues through ecotourism, while the Quichua people described by Whitten, Naranjo et al. (1976), started working for the oil companies as soon as they arrived in the Puyo Runa because the opportunities provided by oil extraction were seen as better than the opportunities previously available – "slave-like debt peonage on *haciendas* along the Napo River" (Sabin, 1998: 152).

Finally, (5) the argument is made that fair compromises can be found in an extractive context. The counternarrative does not argue that the arrangements between local communities and oil firms are always fair or dealt with between partners of equal power: on the contrary, in 1998, Sabin writes that "In Ecuador, as elsewhere, the conditions of extraction have typically forced native groups to choose between no economic development and a form of industrial activity that would undermine the foundations of native cultural and economic life" (Sabin, 1998: 145). What they defend, instead, is that although oil extraction had been an agent of destruction of the environment and cultural disruption (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013), institutional arrangements, or 'middle grounds', could be found to change this relationship. Recognising the possibility of a convergence of interests allows understanding what is better for indigenous

[16] See for instance Guzman-Gallegos (2012), Orta-Martínez and Finer (2010), Rival (1997; 2015), Sabin (1998), Fontaine (2009a), Reider and Wasserstrom (2013) and details in the history chapter (2).

people, and eventually reaching such middle grounds, rather than blockages or compromises which harm indigenous people – as they argue the 'standard narrative' does.

The search for middle grounds is central in the Ecuadorian counternarrative. In fact, this is so due to a fundamental – and questionable – assumption made by its authors: the state cannot afford to stop oil extraction (Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014: 135). The counternarrative mostly addresses positive questions: while the goal is to make sense of people's decisions in given situations, it rarely questions the constraints within which such decisions are made. This is why it ultimately raises more questions than it answers – as I argue in the fourth section of this chapter. Beyond this normative (equally questionable) conclusion, the value of the counternarrative lies in that it allows us to make sense of acceptance as a choice – arguably an improvement compared to variants of political ecology. By recognising the mixed values of indigenous people, the counternarrative brings back agency in the analysis of oil compromises. An important implication is that a process of debate and discussion between the different stakeholders could result in a consensus over the need to extract oil, and in a compromise over the agreements to be made concerning economic compensation, environmental regulation, etc. Through this conception, MCAs might thus result in compromises and legitimise rather than challenge extractive (and other unsustainable) decisions.

A reversed hierarchy of values (limited scope of political ecology)

Neither Martinez-Alier nor Escobar would deny that poor and indigenous people have other than cultural and environmental values, and might value economic outcomes more than the protection of the environment, in some contexts. As Martinez-Alier puts it, it would be "blatant nonsense" (2014: 39) to argue that poor people always think and behave as environmentalists. Both frameworks, however, seek to describe the struggle of some [specific] individuals who rely on the environment as a source of either livelihood or cultural identity, a characteristic on

which their attachment to the environment depends[17]. But Martinez-Alier and Escobar go further in their conception of indigenous and poor people, by postulating a 'reversed hierarchy of needs' (Martinez-Alier, 1995) – which is implicit in both frameworks (see Escobar, 1998; 2011b; Martinez-Alier, 1995; 2002) and sometimes becomes a hierarchy of values – between cultural 'difference' (Escobar, 2008) , and other values, notably economic.

Indeed, while, in Martinez-Alier's writings, poor people depend not only on the environment but on money, he does not expect them to accept any kind of agreement when it comes to make decisions: indigenous and poor local people do not ask monetary compensation, but their ecological and cultural 'difference' to be respected. Martinez-Alier argues that citizens refuse to put a monetary value on their health, their land, or their livelihood, because they "refuse to behave as fictitious consumers in contingent valuation surveys" (2002: 150). In the same way, Escobar's (1998) indigenous people are by no means against education, health, productivity and economic resources. In his new preface to the 1995 book, where he replies to earlier critiques (Notably De Vries, 2007), he also recognises that indigenous people's 'life projects' can include schools and other services brought by modernity. As a result, they incorporate both aspects of modernisation and "long-standing, place-based cultural logics" (Escobar, 2011: xviii). He maintains, however, that indigenous people's cosmovisions "do not entail a linear notion of development, nor a state of "underdevelopment" to be overcome, neither are they based on "scarcity" or the primacy of material goods" (Escobar, 2011: xxvi). Through his conception, the monetary and development values and interests of indigenous people are subordinated to the struggle for 'difference', embedded in livelihood and cultural identity: "development must be guided by principles derived from the rights and aspirations of the local

[17] See Aagesen (1998), Alvard (1993), Coomes (1995), Gari (2001), Gray et al. (2008), Hames (2007), Lu et al. (2010), Orta-Martínez and Finer (2010), Peres (1994).

communities and must support the affirmation of cultures and the protection of natural environments" (1998: 72).

In Escobar's writings, the hierarchy is sometimes framed in a 'difference' and 'equality' language – where equality is defined as the ability not to be treated as hierarchically inferior (but is not given content *a priori* and can be a component of indigenous people's 'life projects', which content is also contextual). It translates as follows: 1) while both 'difference' and 'equality' are valuable, and the goal is to obtain 'difference-in-equality' (Escobar, 2008) – which consists in reaching 'equality' without being denied one's cultural 'difference', 2) 'difference' is the most important consideration when it comes to assess and respond to oil extraction, development and change. Thus, indigenous people often resist modern forms of development which enter in contradiction with their 'life projects' by offering 'equality' only at the expense of their cultural 'difference'[18]. All in all, 'equality' is subordinated to the struggle for 'difference', embedded in livelihood and cultural identity, in the writings of both authors. As a result, and whether intended or not, the way the two frameworks conceptualise people's needs, values and perceptions of change necessarily limits the scope of their analysis to a specific kind of actor for whom change is resisted as long as it does not allow for 'difference'.

Martinez-Alier and Escobar's works are deeply political, and oil extraction is for them very much part of what O'Connor called the 'second contradiction of capitalism' (1994: 162) which, through its conditions of production, destroys its conditions of existence (Escobar, 2011a; Gudynas & Acosta, 2010). An underlying assumption in the two types of conflicts is not only that indigenous people's values are different, but that they should be privileged in the decision-making process: no solution is possible within an extractive context if it involves incommensurable ecological and cultural losses. Indigenous movements are, in their view, the

[18] In Escobar's writings, while colonialism recognised 'difference' but denied 'equality', development is often about 'equality' without 'difference' (Escobar, 2006a).

carriers of alternative societies. It is development and capitalism that Escobar's indigenous people and social movements fight against (Escobar, 1998), and notably the 'cultural assimilation' it implies, denying their cultural, economic and ecological 'difference'. The message of these movements is as follows: "it is no longer the case that one can only contest dispossession and argue for equality from the perspective of inclusion into the dominant culture and economy" (Escobar, 2006a: 133). For Fontaine (2009b; 2007), as a result, political ecology tends to limit the conflicts to the position of radical actors for which what is at stake is a fight against the capitalist development model.

3. An old debate around values and change

This debate around values, which translates into opposed diagnoses of valuation of change and the impacts of change on marginal (poor and indigenous) people, is not a new one.

Popkin and the formalist revolution

Popkin, in 1980, already criticised the moral economy tradition (see Wolf and Scott) for drawing what he considered to be an 'essentialist' picture of peasants – as only concerned with maintaining their subsistence levels (with no sense of 'progress' or 'development') – and which led to see change (in the form of colonialism, the expansion of markets and the formation of central states, through various historical periods in Vietnam) as imposed on, and harmful for them. He wrote: "ways of life that may have existed only for lack of alternatives are extolled as virtues. Peasants who had little or nothing to eat are assumed to have had a rich spiritual life. Sons who may have stayed with their fathers in order to survive are credited with filial piety. What may have been the absence of incentives to change becomes a resistance to innovation and a defense of traditional ways" (1980: 412)[19]. He maintained that "to make the peasant village an ideal for emulation is, in a sense, to impose a heavier burden on peasants than they

[19] In this quote, Popkin refers to local variants of moral economy rather than general authors, which he considers as much more elaborated.

can bear" (1979: x). And he proposed, instead, "a view of the peasant as a rational problem-solver, with a sense both of its own interests and of the need to bargain with others to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes" (1979: ix) – i.e. what he calls a political economy approach, based on the idea of a rational investment logic model to explain the decisions of peasants regarding daily life activities, and change. He showed, finally, by analysing peasants' claims through different periods of revolts in Vietnam, that "peasants are continuously striving not merely to protect but also to raise their subsistence level through long and short term public and private investments" (1980: 413) – and that, as a result, they were sometimes against features of the old system.

For Popkin, such a non-essentialist view of peasants was necessary not only to understand what was good for their welfare, but to give them back agency and intelligence – rather than provoking pity, as he argued moral economists did. Despite the obvious differences with the context in which the counternarrative arose (indigenous people versus peasants, oil extraction versus capitalism as a new economic system, Ecuador versus Vietnam, and the 1960s versus the 1990s), the two approaches have in common that by broadening the set of values among their studied population (indigenous and peasants both in relation with the land), they bring back agency into the analysis of people's decision making in the face of change.

Recent anthropological literature

The anthropological literature, in the same way and more directly in relation to indigenous people's values, has evolved towards a flourishing literature on the increased integration to the markets of indigenous people, as a result of voluntary cultural assimilation (see Alvard, 1993; Gray, 1997; Kuper et al., 2003; Redford & Stearman, 1993 and more recently Bessire, 2014; Cameron, 2010; Cepek, 2011; Fisher, 2000. Lu, 2007). The most recent versions of this argument come as a criticism and response to the "tired binaries of cultural continuity versus culture death" (Bessire, 2014: 19) created by the ontological turn in social theory, and to the

idea of a singular Amerindian cosmology versus modern, western, European philosophy and the dualism nature/culture. Such idea is visible in the stance of earlier anthropologists for whom "another world was possible" (Clastres, referring to alternative modes of political organisation), but would disappear through contact (ethnocide, cultural death and thus, social death). It is equally visible, according to Bessire (2014) and in the Paraguayan case, in the view of NGOs today who, by defining what the "truly legitimate Ayoreo life" should be (referring mostly to uncontacted people) exert violence against the actual Ayoreo-speaking people. In such accounts Bessire argues, "Amerindian worldviews are imagined to hold a revisionary potential for modernity" (2014: 19), and this is harmful for indigenous people. While Bessire describes, instead, the Ayoreo speaking people of Paraguay as the most marginalised and the poorest of any indigenous people, he sees the Encounter with modernity as a necessary condition for survival. He argues: "what appeared initially as losses were, on more thorough acquaintance, zones of intense translation, rational calculus, and partial potentials for Ayoreo-speaking people" – hence the notion of "becoming-through-negation" (2014: 17) he develops through the book. Gray (1997b) criticises a similar literature[20] which sees change as imposed on indigenous people by external forces. Through his account of change in an Arakmbut community, he shows, instead, that "in many cases the Arakmbut actively choose to reformulate their lives (…). They incorporate external influences and make them resonate with their history, mythology, and invisible power of the spirit world" (Gray, 1997b: 3). These people, he argues, are not an isolated case but rather, they are "illustrative of the sorts of problems with which indigenous peoples are confronted all over the world" (Gray, 1997a: 2): not totally integrated nor totally isolated; proud of their culture and try to protect their heritage, but threat from the nation; and in practice, culture survival coupled with influenced from

[20] He criticises, in particular, Ethnic transfiguration theories which in his view portray dominating states against oppressed indigenous people and do not take internal dynamics into account, and Global neo-Marxist approaches which tend to view local initiatives as "passive responses to external conditions" (1997).

outside. He points to the little discussion of "indigenously produced change" – and the fact that ethnographies in South America have focused on describing social and cultural life as it is rather than as a dynamic process. In the same vein, Fisher criticises the romanticised view that would "suggest that a preference for western trade goods represents a corruption of the system of aboriginal beliefs and values" (2000: 3). At the same time, he argues that "the perspective of "Indians as consumers" does little to inform our understanding of change in indigenous societies, beyond implying that once natives are released from the narrow confines of choices available in their own society, they will take their place among the rest of us in the global marketplace" (2000: 2-3). For him, both perspectives downplay the role and agency of indigenous people in accepting or refusing trade goods, and the collective aspect of the acquisition and consumption of such goods (as an "emblem of group achievement"). "A certain repertoire of western trade goods reflected conditions of Xikrin life rather than individual desires for certain items" (2000: 3). Cepek (2011) and Cameron (2010), finally, bring back agency in the study of indigenous people's behaviour in the analysis of governmentality, often top-down. Cepek questions the idea that "environmentalist logics, projects, and movements, are forms of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense", and suggests instead that "many analysts who employ the governmentality paradigm underestimate the degree to which people are capable of forging a critical, self-aware, and culturally framed perspective on collaborative projects for socioecological transformation". For Cameron, who builds a comparative case study between Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru to understand whether decentralisation actually gave power to peasants and indigenous groups and brought more democracy, criticises the idea that change (here, the integration to the dominant system) is imposed on, and bad, for indigenous people. He writes: "rather than assume that governmentality is inevitable and to search for evidence of it, the challenge for the analysis of struggles to control and administer power in the rural Andes is to understand the extent to which indigenous and peasant political actors have

genuinely internalised the rationale underlying the laws that regulate municipal governance – a reflection of governmentality – and the extent to which they are strategically performing for the state and aid donors in order to gain access to municipal power and resources" (2010: 18).

Mixed values as a starting point: links between values and agency and implications

These accounts all tackle the view that "when we change it's called progress, but when they do notably when they adopt some of our progressive things—it's a kind of adulteration, a loss of their culture" (Sahlins, 1999: 17). And the pervasive debate around indigenous people's values results, in all its different versions, in a recognition of the mixed values (sometimes mixed wordviews) of indigenous people, which comes as the logical result of their partial integration (Briggs & Sharp, 2004; Gaonkar, 1999; Van Cott, 1994). From there, (further) change becomes a potentially rational possibility rather than a necessary non-choice, and agency is restored in the investigation of people's decisions and responses in the face of change. Such recognition is arguably a necessary starting point to see indigenous people as more than the passive recipients of externally imposed change, modernity and development (See Sahlins, 1999; Gray, 1997b; Bessire, 2014; Freeman, 2002; Cepek, 2011; Cameron, 2010) and to interpret better their choices and decisions. As a starting point, however, it raises more questions than it answers – especially when recast in a political ecology language which takes incommensurability of values into consideration. In particular: 1) how do indigenous people with 'mixed worldviews' and 'multiple values' assess and respond to 'change' when it comes in the form of projects entailing incommensurable and contradictory dimensions for valuation? How are values hierarchised to reach a decision? Do such decisions entail other consideration than values, and what are these considerations?; 2) what does it mean to embrace, or not to resist, change – when change comes with impacts which are incommensurable with its benefits?; 3) how do 'mixed values' coexist in the first place – if they are incommensurable with each other? For instance, how does cultural difference coexist with the desire for

development? Are they compatible? Complimentary?; 4) how do people struggle with those decisions and how, in turn, do such decisions (oil extraction, development, change) affect people, their territories, their values and their very ecological and cultural 'difference'?; 5) in relation with oil more specifically, how to understand the choice of indigenous people with various incommensurable claims over oil extraction projects involving incommensurable and contradictory local outcomes? What does it entail for them to accept oil extraction in their territories in those cases? How does oil extraction impact people, their economies, values and worldviews?

The critiques of political ecology systematically avoid tackling the important questions which naturally arise from such recognition. In the case of oil, for instance, the counternarrative allows understanding better many instances of compromises and agreements in the historical context of Ecuador, and notably, the reasons why indigenous people accept such projects. But while most of them do recognise the 'difference' of indigenous people, or at least some kind of traditional values and ways of life, they never explicitly or implicitly consider the incommensurable value of these and as a result, fail to ask what it entails for indigenous people to accept oil extraction projects in their territories. One concrete illustration of this is found in Sabin (1998): while he recognises that market integration coexists with traditional ways of life (Lu, 2007) and argues that indigenous communities do not abandon their agricultural, fishing and hunting activities while accepting oil extraction in their territories, he does not touch upon the question of the potential struggles that indigenous people face when making what he calls an economic and cultural cost-benefit analysis, and of what it means for an indigenous person to make the choice of oil extraction. He does not tackle the question of how traditional subsistence activities coexist with market integration and oil extraction, which potential tensions and conflicts arise between the two and how these are negotiated.

4. From oil responses to valuation struggles

An unhelpful dichotomy

In 1999, Sahlins wrote: "to speak of the historical agency of indigenous peoples, true as it may be, is to ignore the tyranny of the Western world-system, thus to conspire intellectually in its violence and domination. Whereas, to speak of the systematic hegemony of imperialism, true as it may be, is to ignore the peoples' struggles for cultural survival, thus to conspire intellectually in Western violence and domination. Alternatively, we can make both global domination and local autonomy morally persuasive — that is, in favor of the peoples — by calling the latter resistance" (1999: v).

The literature on oil conflicts (and non-conflicts) implicitly results in a dichotomy. On the one hand, the specific indigenous people described by political ecology, due to their ecological and cultural 'difference' (which is not only incommensurable with but more important than other needs and values), oppose oil extraction projects (and development projects in their modern forms) in their territories. They are seen as constrained (and implicitly denied agency) as soon as situations of compromises arise. On the other hand, indigenous people with 'mixed values' might accept oil extraction in their territories as the result of a choice at the condition that fair compromises are found – from which we have to infer that a certain level of environmental impacts might be satisfactory depending on the benefits from extractive projects, or that their different values and needs are not incommensurable and that there might be a possible substitution rate between some of the impacts and some of the benefits. The many constraints shaping their choices (and within which agency operates) are then rarely investigated, in the case of these indigenous groups who have accepted oil extraction in their territories.

Beyond indigenous people's responses to oil extraction: valuation struggles in the face of an impossible dilemma between 'difference' and 'equality'

My MPhil thesis (2015), based on a 2-month period of fieldwork in Ecuador in the summer of 2014, investigated a third conceptual possibility beyond that dichotomy: indigenous people for whom values of the environment are incommensurable with their other needs and claims but who do not necessarily have a 'hierarchy' between their various needs and claims. It investigated the responses of the inhabitants of two Quichua communities in the Lower Napo River (Ecuadorian Amazon) to the ITT oil extraction project which entered their territories with both environmental impacts (and consequences in terms of people's livelihoods) and a 'social compensation' (including money, jobs, and benefits in the domains of education and health). The resulting thesis describes the choice of indigenous people who, despite a special relationship with the environment as a source of livelihood and cultural identity, have embraced oil extraction to obtain the necessary and desired benefits, [which are] incommensurable with the impacts from oil. It also describes the choice of (other) indigenous people who, in spite of their socio-economic needs and aspirations, are opposing the oil project in the name of their ecological and cultural 'difference' – [which is] incommensurable with the potential benefits from oil. The thesis ultimately highlighted the importance of investigating, beyond the responses of indigenous people to extractive projects in their territories, the 'valuation struggles' (Dayot 2015) entailed in such decisions.

Oil 'non-conflicts' and valuation struggles between agency and constraint

Because it does not consider the question of incommensurability of values, the counternarrative cannot see the constraints within which people's decisions are embedded and ultimately fails to see potential struggles of indigenous people in the face of change – when it comes to their territories in the form of extractive activities with their incommensurable and incompatible dimensions. political ecology, because of its restricted conception of indigenous people's

values, does not allow recognising the agency of indigenous people in situations of compromises and, ultimately, does not allow space for such struggles either. Obviously, the jump from incommensurability to the pretended reversed 'hierarchy of needs' made by Escobar and Martinez-Alier is not straightforward, and as a corollary, that indigenous people do not privilege their 'difference' over many other values and needs they have does not necessarily entail that there is no incommensurability between them. It does not entail either that the environment is less important than other outcomes. At the same time, the recognition that indigenous people are not fixed settlements but recreate themselves through external change and do make choices is obviously not incompatible with a critical assessment of the constraints and trade-offs imposed on them – or even more implicitly, the strategies of states and firms to shape their values and desires. The questions above have to do with such struggles and valuation struggles – in the face of change and the potential incommensurable losses associated. The investigation of those struggles requires both to acknowledge the constraints faced by indigenous people and to recognise the agency they retain within those constraints. In turn, the study of indigenous people's struggles in the face of change can illuminate these questions.

My thesis seeks to reconceptualise the frameworks of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts in political ecology in the light of the important criticism raised by the counternarrative – recognition of the mixed values of indigenous people – without leaving aside the question of incommensurability and the critical investigation of the constraints within which agency operates and of the structural forces shaping people's decisions. It investigates further (and more specifically) the acceptance of the ITT oil project by the Quichua communities of the Lower Napo River by looking at the valuation struggles involved in such decisions, the constraints within which they are embedded as well as their consequences on peoples and territories. This allows me understanding acceptance and deriving implications for the proposed solution of ecological economics (MCA) in the conclusions.

Chapter 2. The Ecuadorian oil conflict in historical perspective: relevance of the topic in the political context of Ecuador (History chapter)

According to Sabin, indigenous local communities "expelled seismic crews, harassed construction workers, and sequestered government officials" (1998: 144), in order to protest oil projects. In the late 1970s, he adds, a group of Huaoranis "speared to death three survey workers" (1998: 144). In 1992, Huaorani leaders told the then President Durán Ballén that "they did not want to exchange their way of life for his, even for schools and airplanes" (Gerlach, 2003: 75) and their fight against oil firm Conoco in block 16 would be described as an 'environmentalism of the poor' by Martinez-Alier (2002). But "the history of Amazonian oil development is not a simple tale of capitalist penetration and pristine native resistance" (Sabin, 1998: 144). Ecuador presents a unique setting where theories of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts have been deployed, instrumentalised and finally called into question by the Ecuadorian counternarrative introduced in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I put such interpretations in historical and political perspective to show the relevance of such a topic (and the questions raised in the theory chapter) in the contemporary Ecuadorian context.

The first oil companies arrived in the *Oriente*[21] without any legal frame for their activities and relations with the communities (Becerra et al., 2013), and the social compensation they brought did not tackle in any way the environmental and cultural impacts of oil extraction, nor did it bring real development to the communities (Becerra et al., 2013). The indigenous movement, rising in the 1990s with the support of environmental groups worldwide, adopted a strong anti-extractivist rhetoric. Such rhetoric, however, hid more nuanced claims – notably the heterogeneity of the movement, the use of discursive strategies to build alliances with national and international NGOs, and the socio-economic demands of indigenous local communities, often neglected by the state. Following years of unregulated oil activities in the Amazon, the

[21] Other name for the Ecuadorian Amazon.

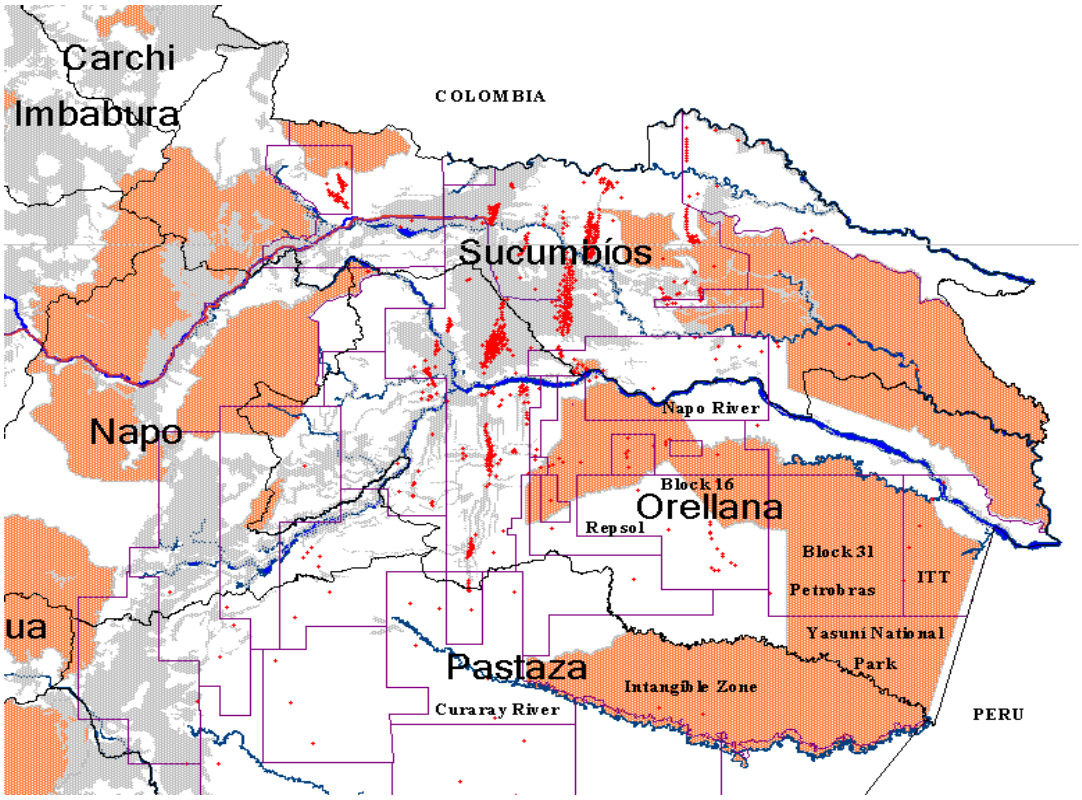
Correa administration was particularly innovative and radical in its legislation over the industry, and more generally in the recognition of the rights of nature and indigenous people. But after the failure of the Yasuní-ITT initiative, which made the possibility of 'leaving oil underground' utopian for a country where oil extraction represents 56.8 per cent of the total exports (BCE, 2013), the strategy of the state shifted towards the building of a new extractive compromise. While the Constitution gave a new voice to local indigenous communities through the right to prior consultation, conducted from 2011 in the country, many local communities voted in favour of oil extraction (Vallejo, 2014). The question of how and why indigenous people accept oil extraction in their territories when faced with incommensurable trade-offs is of utter importance in Ecuador, in a context where the measures of mitigation and redistribution implemented by the Ecuadorian State could be interpreted as a new 'middle ground' between indigenous people, the oil companies and the state.

This chapter retraces, in five stages, the history of oil extraction and indigenous people in the country. In a first section, I briefly present the development of oil activities since the late 1960s in the Amazon and its impacts on the environment and indigenous people. In a second section, I describe the rise of the national indigenous movement starting in the 1990s, in a favourable international context regarding environmental protection and the rights of indigenous people. In a third section, I highlight the complexity, heterogeneity and ambiguities of indigenous people's claims. In a fourth section, I show that the Correa administration responded, across two chronological stages, to the ecological and cultural demands of the indigenous movement and to the social demands of indigenous communities. I finally zoom on the ITT oil project and the dilemma created by the oil package (local impacts and benefits) for the Quichua inhabitants of the Lower Napo River, in a fifth section, which I conclude by highlighting the importance of understanding why and how indigenous people accept oil extraction in their territories in the current Ecuadorian context.

1. Unregulated oil development and its impacts on indigenous people

The Ecuadorian Amazon, covering 45% of the country, had historically been neglected by the Ecuadorian State (Andy Díaz, 2005). In the 1960s and 1970s, it was one of the poorest and less inhabited regions of Ecuador despite its large surface, and it was home to a large proportion of indigenous people. The relations between indigenous communities and oil companies were marked by the presence of militaries and the dispossession of ancestral territories (Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014), which were declared zones of 'national security' (Little, 1992: 48). Since the 1970s, 65 per cent of the Ecuadorian Amazon has been 'zoned' for oil activities (see Figure 2), and the blocks overlap the territories of ten indigenous groups (Finer et al., 2008).

Figure 2: Oil blocks in the Amazon



Source: Larrea (2015)

According to Finer et al., the history of oil development in the western Amazon is "one of massive ecological and social disruption" (2008: 178).

Erosion of land and dispersion of wildlife followed hundreds of seismic detonations, and the two billion barrels extracted between 1972 and 2004 provoked ecosystem destruction and deforestation – thousands of miles of trail-clearing, according to Hurtig and San Sebastian (2002: 2021). These were also indirect impacts related to the colonization allowed by oil roads (Kimerling, 1990: 855; Sabin 1998), which provoked the migration of *mestizos* in the Amazon during land reforms in the 1970s (Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014). In particular, according to Hurtig and San Sebastian (2004), extractive technologies in the 1970s resulted in large contamination, and more than 30 billion gallons of toxic wastes and crude oil were released into the Ecuadorian Amazon between 1972 and 1993. Texaco, the primary foreign company to produce oil in Ecuador (Sawyer, 2004) between 1964 and 1992, is said to have spilled more than the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska in 1989, as the comparison has become famous in Ecuador. Texaco "did not dismantle many old wells and did not rehabilitate areas surrounding production sites" (Sabin, 1998: 150), and used highly contaminating technologies which had long been illegal in the US. Contamination had impacts on indigenous people's livelihoods (Kimerling, 1990), through decrease in land productivity and high mortality of the animals. It would also be identified as the cause of severe impacts on health (Hurtig & San Sebastian, 2002; Orta-Martínez & Finer, 2010; Paichard, 2012; San Sebastián & Hurtig, 2004), including higher cancer, morbidity and abortion rates, higher malnutrition, anaemia and skin problems, and diseases due to the impact of contamination on animals (Paichard, 2012). Health impacts were particularly damaging among non-contacted indigenous populations, with increased mortality and morbidity due to contact (Finer et al., 2008). Oil extraction was finally denounced in the country for its cultural and social impacts on indigenous people, such as the violation of indigenous rights and ancestral territories (Kimerling, 1990), and for its social impacts, among which the loss of social cohesion in the communities, sexual abuses and prostitution (Becerra et al., 2013; Beristain, Rovira, & Fernández, 2009; Jochnick, 1994).

In the early stages of oil development in the Amazon, the relations between indigenous communities and oil companies were merely marked by the presence of militaries and the dispossession of ancestral territories (Becerra et al., 2013; Beristain et al., 2009; Jochnick, 1994; Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014) – as indigenous territories were declared zones of 'national security' (Little, 1992: 48) – in a region that had historically been neglected by the Ecuadorian State (Andy Díaz, 2005). Oil extraction was unregulated[22] and so were its impacts. The pollution damages to the health, water sources and means of subsistence (crops and animals) of local people remained unmitigated and uncompensated, and local communities did not participate in the planning of exploration and development either (Sabin, 1998: 150). In 1990, Kimerling would conclude that oil extraction meant "destruction rather than progress" (1990: 415) for the local indigenous people living in the Amazon rainforests who suffered the costs of oil development without sharing its benefits and without participating in the decisions. More generally, oil extraction did not help improving the social conditions, nor decreasing poverty, in the Amazon region (Larrea, 2014a; Rival, 2012).

2. The rise of the indigenous movement

It is not before the late 1980s that indigenous people started organising politically against the oil companies, in a context of neoliberal reforms which increased the reliance on and the importance of oil extraction for the Ecuadorian State (Gerlach, 2003), but also of better recognition of environmental matters at the international level (Rival, 1997), and improvements in both international and national laws regarding the rights of indigenous people (Martí i Puig, 2010). In a context of debt crisis – largely attributed to the oil industry in Ecuador, which had developed in a context of high liquidity at the international level during the 1970s –, economic stagnation and neoliberal reforms, less and less advantageous oil contracts were granted to

[22] According to Sabin (1998: 150), the first small environmental agency was established by the national government in 1984, and the state oil company did not have an environmental unit until 1986.

multinational companies (Juteau, 2012) during that period. As the oil frontier was moving South in the Amazon, these companies found increased resistance among indigenous people and their newly created political organisations – such as the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador – CONAIE), the indigenous national representative organisation (Finer et al., 2008; Jameson, 2011), the *Confederación De Nacionalidades Indígenas De La Amazonia Ecuatoriana* (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon – CONFENIAE) at the level of the Amazon (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013), and local federations.

While environmentalist movements from the US and Europe already denounced the environmental impacts of oil extraction in the 1970s, the 1990s saw the emergence of new alliances between indigenous organisations and environmental NGOs (Fontaine, 2004a). The anti-oil campaign *Amazonia por la vida* (the 'Amazon campaign for life'), launched in 1989 in reaction to the plans for oil extraction in the Yasuní National Park (YNP) by the oil firm Conoco, is probably the first illustration of such alliance in Ecuador. The campaign was led by national and US environmental groups, among which *Acción Ecológica*, an Ecuadorian NGO created in 1987 which arguably marked the passage from institutional environmentalism to ecological activism in Ecuador (Fontaine, 2009a; Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014). Others included Rainforest Action Network, Natural Resources Defence Council, the Sierra Club and the Sierra Club Legal Defence Fund (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013). It was joined by indigenous organisations and notably the Huaorani people.

Together, indigenous people and environmentalists denounced the environmental and human impacts of oil extraction through the languages of ecology, ethnicity and indigenous rights allowed by these alliances (Fontaine, 2009a). The fight of the Huaorani people against oil firm Conoco (in block 16), in particular, whose leaders in 1992 told the then President Durán Ballén that "they did not want to exchange their way of life for his, even for schools and airplanes"

(Gerlach, 2003: 75), would be described as an 'environmentalism of the poor' by Martinez-Alier (2002). The same discourse, Reiner and Wasserstrom (2013) argue, would be used over the next fifteen years against international oil companies such as Conoco, Maxus, and Texaco. It would also contribute to some legal and institutional improvement, such as the creation of a Ministry of the Environment in 1997 and stronger legislation over oil extraction in environmental and social terms in the Constitution of 1998 – which recognised the collective rights of indigenous and black populations (Perreault, 2003), the protection of the environment and the rights to prior consultation of indigenous and local communities, even though the law would be weakly applied (Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014). The "legendary 1989 Sarayaku Agreements" (Vasquez, 2014: 80) and the 1992 march of OPIP from Puyo to Quito would allow the legalisation of indigenous territories, after decades of demands. The movement would also succeed in delaying oil extraction projects in some sites (Finer et al., 2008): oil exploration in blocks 23 and 24 was stopped for over seven years, for instance, through protest campaigns and protest events (Jameson, 2011). Finally, it would be particularly successful in raising awareness and attracting the media (Fontaine, 2009a; Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014), notably in 1993 through the class-action suit taken against Texaco, presented in the US by thirty thousand Ecuadorians for the pollution caused locally (Martinez-Alier, 2002).

The indigenous movement would gain the support of NGOs and academics worldwide throughout the 1990s (Conklin & Graham, 1995; Fontaine, 2009). It would also grow more political and gain increased political space (Jameson, 2011: 63), and be described as "one of the strongest indigenous movements of the continent" (Yashar, 2006). The creation of *Pachakutik* in 1996, defined as the party of indigenous people, would mark "the Indian movement's entrance into Ecuador's traditional electoral process" (Gerlach, 2003: 76). The two central demands of the movement were the recognition of Ecuador as a plurinational state, and the control of indigenous groups over territory (Jameson, 2011). But the claims of the

movement increasingly went beyond the rights of indigenous people. The indigenous movement, critical of the reliance of the state on resource extraction, defended a development path toward an economy of services based on bio-knowledge and tourism (Lalander & Peralta, 2012). For Viteri, Sarayaku leader, "the fight, in political terms, is about resistance to neoliberalism" (2004: 3), and Escobar would characterise the Ecuadorian indigenous movement as no less than 'ontological struggles' (2011), referring to "a different way of imagining life" (2011: xvii).

3. Heterogeneity of the movement, ambiguities and compromises at the local level

The clear political position of the CONAIE, however, hid more nuanced claims, notably at the local level. The counternarrative presented in the theory chapter arises, empirically and in the Ecuadorian context, from the recognition of the heterogeneities of the movement across time and region, the ambiguities and the use of discursive strategies at the level of organisations, and finally, the discrepancies between the claims of organisations and the material preoccupations of local federations and local indigenous communities (Perreault, 2001; 2003) – which needs were sometimes accommodated through oil extraction.

Heterogeneities

While some of the Amazon organisations directly opposed oil exploration and were successful in some cases (notably in the South), others, such as OPIP, fought to limit the ecological and social impacts of oil extraction and finally, some indigenous organisations chose to negotiate the indemnities and compensation of oil extraction. This is the case of the Quichua communities of Napo and Pastaza (Fontaine, 2009a). Notably in the 2000s, conflicts arising in Orellana and Sucumbíos, the most *petroleras*[23] of the Amazon regions, were oriented toward social justice – although the environment remained important in these struggles (Fontaine,

[23] The two regions concentrate more than 85% of national oil production according to Juteau-Martineau, Becerra et al. (2014: 123).

2009a). Conflicts against the construction of the oil pipeline for heavy crude in 2003, for instance, revolved around the payment of indemnities and investments in basic services, and questions of social investments and economic development in the region were central to the 2007 mobilizations in Dayuma against oil extraction in the YNP. For Fontaine, the whole movement grew more heterogeneous over time, eventually provoking "the disarticulation of the Amazonian indigenous movement" (Fontaine, 2009a: 4) during the 2000s.

Ambiguities and the use of discursive strategies

Moreover, the depiction of indigenous organisations as anti-extractivist was partly the result of the use of 'strategic essentialism' (Engle, 2010: 10). Indeed, a strong anti-extractivist stance built on the languages of ethnicity and ecology helped indigenous people building alliances with environmental and human rights NGOs, which in turn helped them putting their claims, mainly territorial, in the national and even the global agendas (Ramos, 1994; Rogers, 1996; Valdivia, 2005)[24]. In the OPIP case, Sawyer argues, although environmental concerns were important – "no one wanted their rivers contaminated or their territorial rights undermined" (Sawyer, 2004: 81) – the use of a certain environmental discourse was also key to obtain international political and economic support: "whether addressing the media, state officials, fellow citizens, or international greens, indigenous rhetoric was laced with images of Indians as the crusaders of the rain forest" (Sawyer, 2004: 53). This discourse, however, often hid more nuanced claims, notably economic and social (Fontaine, 2009a). For Valdivia, the image of indigenous people as "living in a harmonious relationship with nature" (2005: 285), and against all kind of development (Sabin, 1998), was also part of the "rhetoric of national consciousness" (Valdivia, 2005: 285)[25]. It was important in the discourse of NGOs, some of which favoured indigenous people who were able to articulate a clear position (Guzman-Gallegos, 2012).

[24] See also Cunha & De Almeida (2000), Kuper et al. (2003), Redford & Sanderson (2000).
[25] See also Lucero (2006), Muratorio (1994), Radcliffe & Westwood (1996), Rogers (1996), Whitten, Scott Whitten, & Chango (1997).

Moreover, campaigning organisations eventually stopped supporting communities seen as seeking financial benefits, and as having "chosen integration, and given up on cultural difference" (Rival, 1997: 3).

Local demands and poverty at the local level

Finally, given the poverty of indigenous people in the Amazon, the relative absence of the state in the region (Bustamante, 2007; Juteau, 2012; Muratorio, 1991), and the ability of the oil firms to bring 'social compensation' to the communities, the interests of the oil companies and indigenous people did converge in some circumstances (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013).

O'Connor (1994) shows that although indigenous leaders were clearly against oil extraction in block 16, some Huaorani people were not. Instead, they wanted their lands to be recognised and to share the benefits of oil development. As a result, conflicts arose between environmentalists and the Huaorani people who "did not want to be 'preserved'" (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013: 41). An agreement of 'friendship, respect and mutual support' was finally signed in 1993, between Maxus[26] and the *Organización de la Nacionalidad Huaorani del Ecuador* (Organization of the Huaorani Nationality of the Ecuadorian Amazon – ONHAE), over the social development of the community for twenty years – notably through investments in education and health (Rival, 1997). Moreover, according to Fontaine, while OPIP had managed to prevent the construction of a road to access block 10, the decision was reversed in 2002 by local Quichua communities who saw it as an opportunity for market integration (Fontaine, 2009a).

In fact, the oil companies increasingly displayed a "moral obligation to help the social development of the communities they [were] affecting" (Rival, 1997: 4). The oil firms bought 'social peace' through social compensation (Acción Ecológica, 2013; Juteau-Martineau et al.,

[26] Maxus was bought by Spanish company Repsol in 1995 (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013).

2014; Rival, 2015; Sabin, 1998), which took the form of material goods (Vallejo, 2014), schools and coliseums (Becerra et al., 2013), health centres and other 'public services' (Guzman-Gallegos, 2012; Orta-Martínez & Finer, 2010; Rival, 1997; Rival, 2015; Sabin, 1998), and finally jobs and cash (Orta-Martínez & Finer, 2010; Rival, 2015). They even financed the headquarters of some federations (Sabin, 1998; Ziegler-Otero & Ziegler-Otero, 2006). Although such compensation was insignificant for the oil companies (Sawyer, 2004), the benefits were arguably substantial at the local level: oil firms increasingly became the provider of basic services that the communities could not obtain. As a result, indigenous people learnt how to negotiate and take advantage of the oil companies (Haley, 2004), and different arrangements helped solve social conflicts punctually (Fontaine, 2009a).

On the other hand, Becerra et al. (2013) argue, the 'compensation' did not tackle in any way the problem of contamination nor did it bring real development to the communities. Notably, "investments in public health were not significant enough to reduce the vulnerability of the most exposed populations" (Becerra et al., 2013: 113). Social compensation was unregulated, but also paternalistic (Becerra et al., 2013), "if not coercive" (Rival, 2015: nd), and created tensions between the communities (Guzman-Gallegos, 2012; Urteaga-Crovetto, 2012: 115).

In fact, beyond the recognition of the various claims of indigenous people and the fact that they are not always unambiguously against oil extraction, the counternarrative points to the historical failure of the state to build compromises in Ecuador (Reider & Wasserstrom, 2013). Following forty years of unregulated and uncompensated oil development in the Amazon, the Correa administration made unprecedented changes, in two different directions.

4. Correa (2006-2017), between rupture and compromise

Rupture

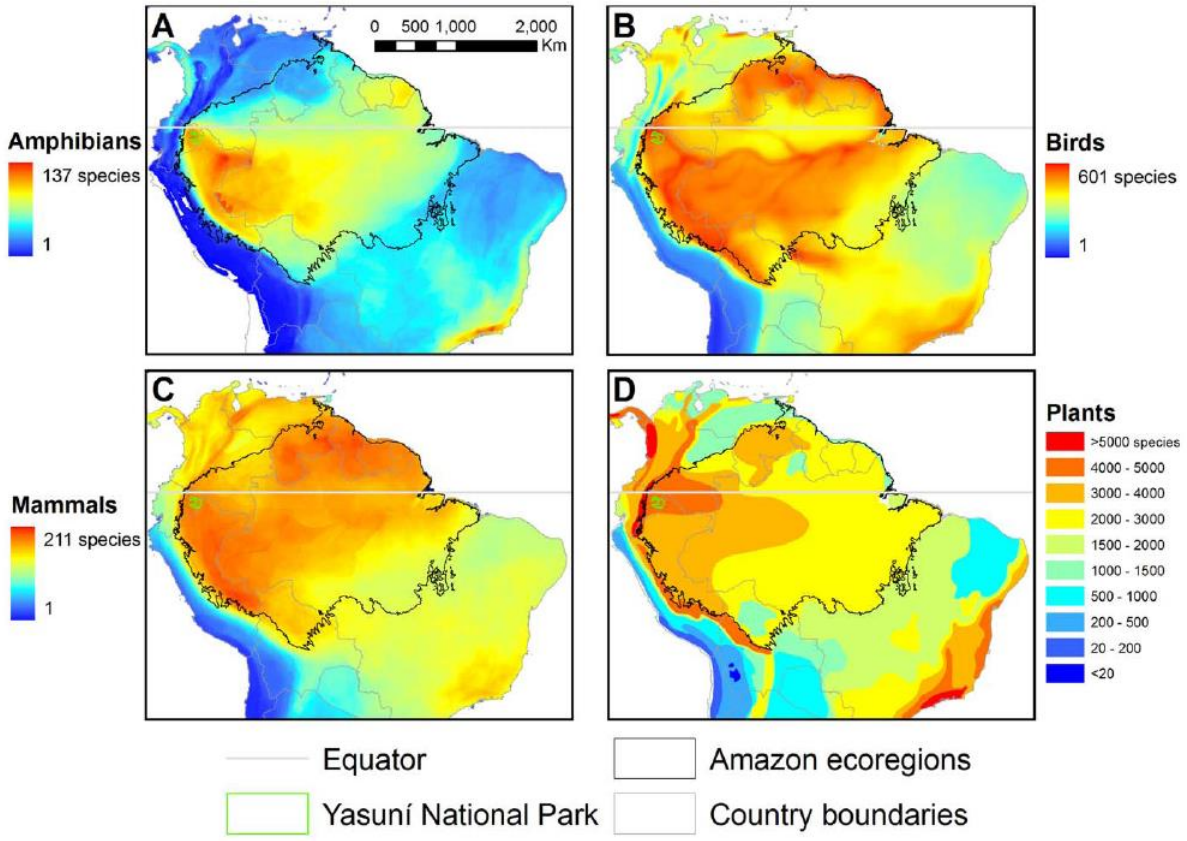
The election of Correa, in 2006, brought an unprecedented attention to the claims of the national indigenous movement (Lalander & Peralta, 2012: 22). Correa and the CONAIE shared an emphasis on the search for alternatives to the neoliberal policies in Ecuador. Correa provided the indigenous movement with a figure (Lalander & Peralta, 2012), and although there was no formal alliance between *Alianza País* and *Pachakutik*, the latter supported Correa in the 2006 elections. During Correa's first mandate, the presence of indigenous people in the government multiplied (Lalander & Peralta, 2012: 22).

The early years of the Presidency were marked by an innovative approach towards strong environmental legislation. The Yasuní-ITT initiative, by proposing to leave 20 per cent of the country's remaining reserves underground – in exchange for a monetary compensation and with the stated goal of mitigating climate change (Rival, 2012) – represented an innovative solution for Ecuador to develop while protecting the biodiversity of the YNP and respecting the rights of indigenous people living in the Park (Finer, Moncel, & Jenkins, 2010). In compensation for what was framed as a sacrifice of Ecuador "in benefit of the entire planet" (Correa, 2007: 2), President Correa asked the international community to provide the country with half of the revenues it would have gotten with oil extraction: $350 million per year during thirteen years (Rival, 2012). The resulting fund was supposed to finance investments in the sectors of renewable energy, biodiversity protection, equitable social development and energy efficiency (Larrea, 2015). MCA, the preferred tool of ecological economics to take

incommensurability into account in decision-making, was embraced by some academics and state officials[27] to assess and justify the implementation of the initiative[28].

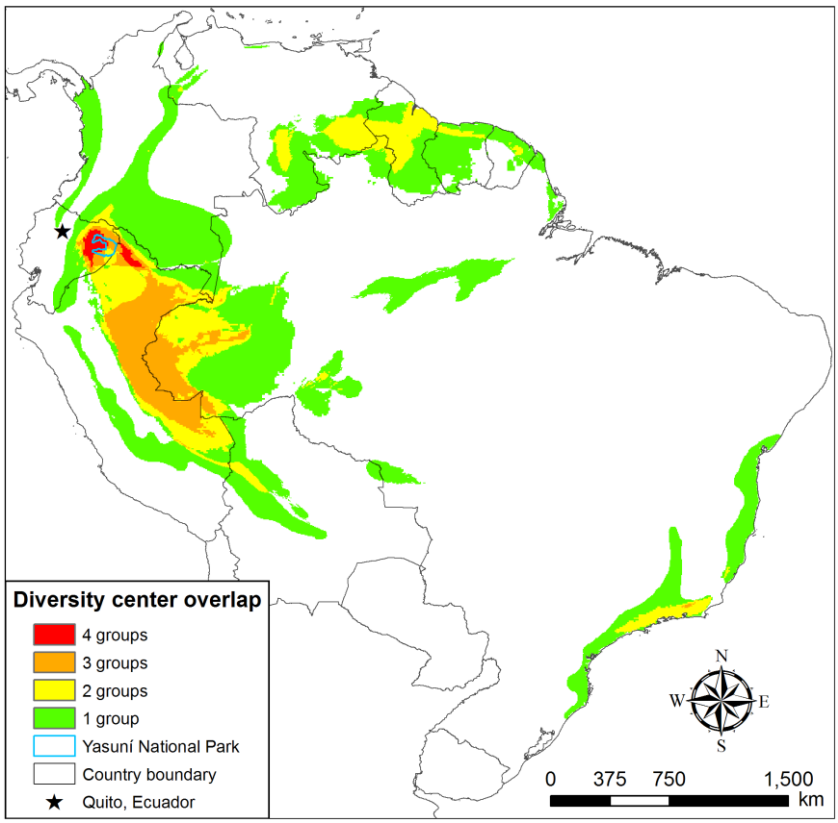
The YNP of 982,000 hectares is arguably a symbol of the contradictions of the Ecuadorian State. Created in 1979, it was immediately penetrated by the Auca and Yuca roads (Fontaine, 2009a) for oil extraction. A spot of biodiversity in the Amazon (see Figure 3), it would be declared "Man and Biosphere Reserve" of the UNESCO in 1989 (Bass et al., 2010).

Figure 3: The biodiversity of the YNP



[27] Among whom Carlos Larrea, technical coordinator of the Yasuní-ITT initiative under the government of Correa, Fander Falconi, former Foreign Minister, and Alberto Acosta, former Minister of Energy and Mines and President of the National Constituent Assembly.

[28] In the ITT case, Vallejo et al. (2011) considered the economic, social, political and environmental dimensions of the two possible plans of the Government: oil extraction in the ITT fields, on the one hand, and the initiative on the other hand. They assigned an equal weight to each of the dimensions and found that the initiative was strictly superior to oil extraction in the ITT fields, on all the dimensions considered (See also Larrea, 2010).



Source: Bass et al. (2010)

Through the initiative, the government made a step towards the recognition of the "classic dilemma" (Pellegrini et al., 2013: 3) arising in extractivist states between development and the protection of ecological and cultural diversity.

The new Constitution, accepted in 2008 by more than sixty-four per cent of the Ecuadorian electorate (Lalander & Peralta, 2012), made a step further in the recognition of the incommensurable value of Nature and indigenous culture. The Constitution not only prohibited extractive activities in protected areas (Finer et al., 2009), but gave rights to Nature and institutionalised the notion of lexicographic structure of preferences: "no amount of any other good or service can compensate for the loss of the Rights of Nature" (Rodríguez-Labajos & Martínez-Alier, 2013: 339). As such, it was considered as the most radical constitutional text in the world in relation to the provision of legal protection of nature, with the one of Bolivia

(Lalander & Peralta, 2012) and was also said to represent "significant and dramatic gains for indigenous aspirations" (Becker, 2011: 57).

The Constitution, indeed, also went further in the recognition of indigenous rights – notably the rights of "embracing an ethnic identity, being free of racial discrimination, holding communal territories, and protecting natural resources" (Becker, 2011: 57). Quichua and Shuar became official languages, together with Spanish (Lalander & Peralta, 2012). Moreover, built around the Quichua concept of '*sumak kawsay*' – defined by Fernandez-Marti as "an ancestral lifestyle and indigenous spiritual idea where the human being is in complete equilibrium and harmony with its environment and universe as a whole" (2012: 20) and sometimes translated as *buen vivir* ('the good life') (Lalander & Peralta, 2012) – it was the first one in Latin America to define its state as plurinational, which for Becker marked "the culmination of two centuries of struggle for sumac kawsay" (Becker, 2011: 60). For Escobar, rights to nature and the concept of *buen vivir* are based on ideas that do not fit the "environmental political correctness" and "the philosophical structure of modern constitution, within which nature is seen as an inert object for humans to appropriate" (2011: xxviii).

Compromise

Paradoxically, the Yasuní-ITT initiative coexisted with increased reliance of the state on extractivism as the main driver of economic growth (Bebbington, 2011; Vallejo, 2014). New gold and copper mining were opened in the Amazon (Bebbington et al., 2008) and despite great institutional improvements, the application of many of Correa's progressive commitments remained "subordinated to strategic interests of development" (Vallejo, 2014: 118). For Becker, the Constitution would finally provide "little possibility of fundamental society change" (2011: 52). Beyond its rhetoric, the idea of the government was arguably more to change extraction (Acosta & Martínez, 2009) than to stop it: "for Ecuador to say no to natural resource-led development would be tantamount to 'beggars sitting on a bag of gold', and (…) extractive

processes need not be destructive" (Pellegrini et al., 2013: 10). In other words, the idea was to challenge the 'recourse curse' and its environmental aspects (Larrea, 2014b), rather than to embrace what the Constitution stated as a fundamental contradiction between oil extraction, environmental protection and cultural rights.

Correa's discourse shifted towards a new compromise, based on the assumption that poverty-alleviation, particularly in the Amazon region, as well as the rights of Nature and the rights of citizens to live in a healthy environment are better served by oil extraction (Acosta & Martínez, 2009; Barrientos, Gideon, & Molyneux, 2008; Bebbington, 2009; Correa Delgado, 2013: 3). The new discourse of the government emphasises in particular the need for oil extraction to finance poverty alleviation (Acosta & Martínez, 2009; Barrientos et al., 2008; Bebbington, 2009), education and health (DW News, 2011; Reygadas & Filgueira, 2010). In that regard the 2008 Constitution gives rights to prior consent[29], participation in the benefits, and indemnities for the social, cultural and environmental impacts of resource extraction (Simbaña, 2012).

To meet the new rhetoric, the state re-appropriated oil activities through nationalisations (Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014: 132). The Law of Hydrocarbons, reformed in 2010, modifies the status of oil contracts with multinational companies – contracts of services instead of participative contracts (Cevallos, 2014) – to increase the rent of the state. It also allocates 12% of the profits from strategic projects (principally oil and mining extraction) to the local zones of 'direct influence' (Cevallos, 2014). The public firm *Ecuador Estratégico* (EE) is in charge of the investments, in the sectors of education, health, water, electricity and infrastructures (Ecuador Estratégico, 2015). On the environmental side, new technologies and instruments were created to minimise and mitigate the environmental damage related to oil extraction, such

[29] The right to prior consent was already in the 1998 Constitution but its application was subordinated to another law which was never passed (Simbaña, 2012). The art. 1 of the 2008 Constitution states that all the rights of the Constitution are directly applicable.

as the PRAS [*Programa de Reparación Ambiental y Social* – Programme for Environmental and Social Reparation] (Juteau-Martineau et al., 2014: 134), created in 2008 as part of the Ministry of the Environment (MAE). Moreover, *Estudios de Impacto Ambiental* (Environmental Impact Assessments – EIA) are carried out for every project.

Figure 4: '*El petroleo mejora tu comunidad'* [oil improves your community] sign in Nuevo Rocafuerte, Lower Napo River, November 2016



Source: the author

Finally, the abandon of the initiative in 2013 meant the launch of the 11th oil round[30] of oil extraction in the country, of which the ITT block is part (Vallejo, 2014).

Indigenous people's responses and polarization of the Ecuadorian society

After the failure of the initiative, *The Yasunidos* – a civil movement self-defined as anti-extractivist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist[31] – emerged, to propose a national referendum on oil extraction in the ITT, with the support of 670.000 citizens (Larrea, 2015). The petition was rejected by the government. Oil extraction in the ITT fields is a controversial project in Ecuador, and "more than any other issue, the conflicts over mining illustrated the wide, growing and seemingly unbridgeable gap between Correa and the social movements" (Becker, 2011: 58) – famously labelled "infantile environmentalists", "creating obstacles to economic development" and "blocking the country's progress" (Jameson, 2011: 58) by Correa. The national indigenous movement also grew in opposition to the Correa's government (Bebbington, 2009: 18; Bebbington, 2011; Jameson, 2011; Lalander & Peralta, 2012). In 2009 already, the President of the CONAIE, Marlon Santi, declared that "in the current circumstances, the development model is one which does not understand the life model that the indigenous movement defends" (Interview with Santi, 2009, quoted in Lalander & Peralta, 2012: 31). However, this is in such context of rupture that, as Vallejo (2014) shows, Quichua leaders who opposed oil extraction until ten years before became supportive of the development policies of the government and willing to share the oil rents. Moreover, for the second time in the history of Ecuador[32], a round of prior consultation was conducted from 2011 in the communities affected by oil extraction in their territories, and many communities voted in

[30] The 11th round consists of 21 blocks in total, in Pastaza, Morona-Santiago, Napo and Orellana (Vallejo, 2014).
[31] Collective interview, Quito, August 2014.
[32] The first one was in 2003 (Fontaine, 2009b).

favour (Vallejo, 2014). In parallel to the launch of the 11th round, thirty agreements of social investments were signed with community leaders and local governments (Vallejo, 2014).

Figure 5: '*Democracia en extinción'* [democracy going extinct] sign made by the Yasunidos and found on the door of the headquarters of *Acción Ecológica*, February 2017



Source: the author

Figure 6: *Alianza País* campaign in Tiputini before the 2017 presidential elections



Source: the author

5. Zoom on the ITT oil project

The ITT fields of the YNP in the Ecuadorian Amazon are composed of three parts: Ishpingo, Tambococha, and Tiputini. The license for the two latter was obtained in May 2014 from state oil company Petroamazonas (PAM), and the first barrels were extracted in March 2016 in Tiputini[33]). The licence for the Ishpingo part of the project had not been obtained yet at the moment of my stay, and oil extraction (drilling) in Ishpingo still has not started. [34]

[33] 2 of the 4 new platforms which were the focus of the prior consultation of August 2016 were part of Tambococha, and they were going to cross directly the territory of Boca Tiputini (as is visible in figure 12 p75).
[34] The Ishpingo part of the project is the most debated one, because it reaches close to the *zona intangible Tagaeri Taromenane* (ZITT – intangible zone Tagaeri Taromenane), which is the name of two indigenous groups living in voluntary isolation, and often also referred to as the 'uncontacted people', where extractive activities are forbidden by Art. 57 of the 2008 Constitution (see Narváez, Maldonado and Pichilingue 2018). Concretely, 6 of the 10 platforms which are planned to be built as part of the Ishpingo part of the project are situated directly in the zona de amortiguamiento (buffer zone) – which is the area of 10 kilometres surrounding the ZITT. The seismic study for Ishpingo would overlap that same zone too (and would get as close as 5 kilometres from people's *chacras*). This is an issue because the ZITT itself is arguably too small to actually protect the uncontacted people from unwanted contact, as shown by Baroja and Bayón (2018). What can be feared as a result, according to Narváez, Maldonado and Pichilingue (2018) is a genocide of those people.

The block is situated in the canton of Aguarico (in the Province of Orellana, one of the 6 Amazonian Provinces of Ecuador, created in 1998 – previously part of the large Napo Province) which counts about 5,000 people today and is mainly populated by Quichua inhabitants, most of whom arrived from Archidona during the rubber boom in the 1920s (following their patrons to work on rubber extraction), and some *mestizos* who arrived in subsequent waves of migration[35]. They later organised into communities along the Napo River.

The Lower Napo River

Of the fourteen indigenous nationalities of Ecuador, the Quichua are the most important in terms of population (Fernandez-Marti, 2012). It is also the most numerous indigenous group in the Ecuadorian Amazon[36]. The Quichua emigrated from the Western part to the Eastern part of the Amazon during the rubber boom (Muratorio, 1991), and now often live in areas which are rich in minerals and oil. The ethnography realised by Holt et al. (2004) emphasises the particularities of this acculturated yet in many ways traditional indigenous group, whose recent history of contact[37] probably makes them the most assimilated of Ecuador's indigenous peoples (Holt et al., 2004). In particular, Quichua people are often involved in agricultural labour and cash cropping (Lu, 2007) but also in wage labour (Holt et al., 2004), illustrating the idea that integration to the market does not imply that indigenous people abandon their traditional ways of life and their subsistence activities. Attachment to the land, which embodies such activities but also a 'peaceful life', remains high and is a key factor in the rural way of life of Quichua

[35] A second wave of migration probably occurred with the agrarian reform in the 1960s and 1970s, though the fact the lower part of the Napo River is not linked by road to the rest of the country probably largely limited its colonization. Wasserstrom and Southgate, in their analysis of 4 different parts of the Amazon region – in relation with patterns of colonization, agriculture and oil – consider this part of the Amazon (the Lower Napo River) to be in the 4th category they call 'The Remote Frontier (No Roads, Oil or Colonization)' (2013: 40).
[36] According to Wasserstrom and Bustamante (2015: 9), there were 118,244 Quichua people in the Amazon in 2010 as compared to 18,397 in 1950, which corresponds to a growth rate of 3.2% per year between the two dates.
[37] For a full account on Quichua people's recent history, see Muratorio (1991).

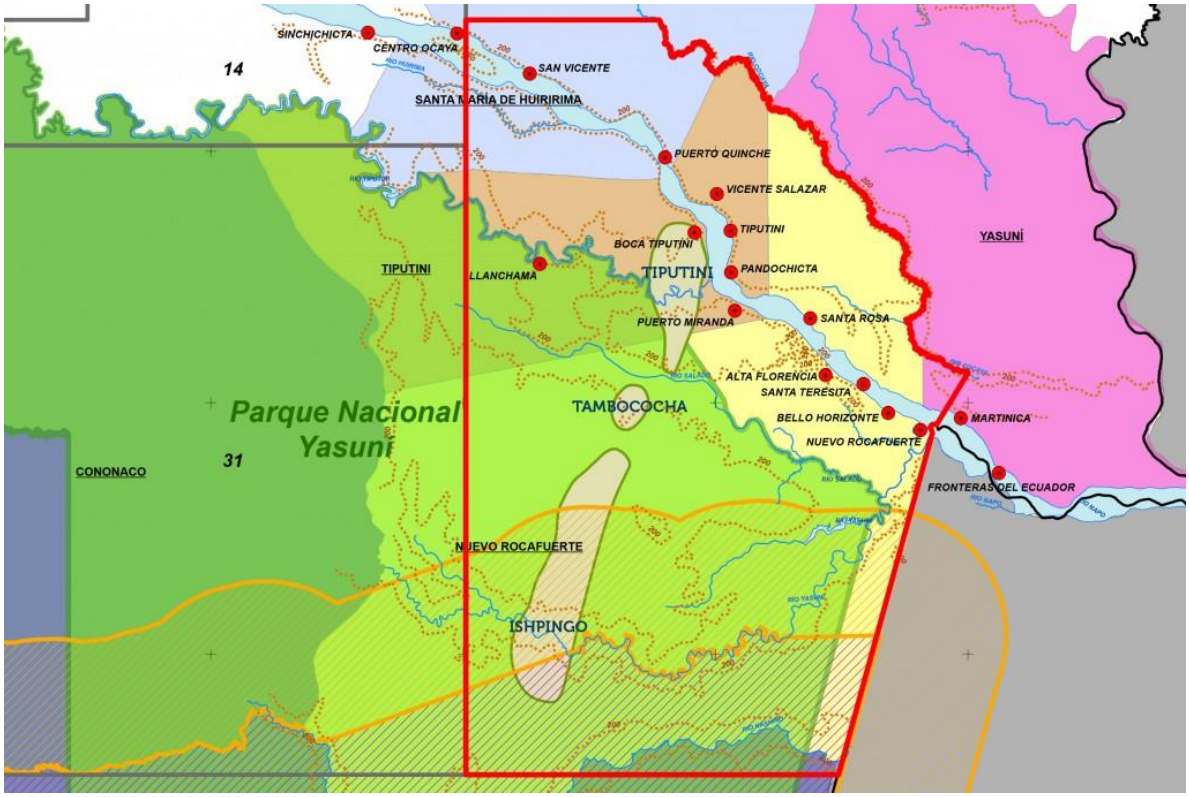
communities (Holt et al., 2004). They are often educated[38] and frequently speak both Quichua and Spanish.

Local impacts and benefits

In the ITT case, sixteen communities[39] are defined as being inside the 'zone of direct influence' (see figure 7 below). In theory, this means they are supposed to benefit from social investments made by EE in exchange for oil extraction in their territories. In practice, I very rarely heard of (or seen any work by) EE in the communities, and the benefits mainly revolved around the *indemnización* and 'social compensation' provided by PAM to the six communities directly crossed by the oil facilities. The *indemnización* is given to the inhabitants in exchange for the use of the land. It is compulsory and in theory, it is decided by a third party (DINAC), although in practice it often results in a direct negotiation between the firm and the communities (Becerra et al., 2013). The different amounts (between 128 and 512,000 dollars) given to the six communities crossed by the oil facilities of the ITT block are summarised in a table in Appendix II. The social compensation is not defined in an amount of money but in 'works'[40] and the different works provided to the six different communities inside the ITT block (with their corresponding amount) are summarised in Appendix I. Finally, the whole area of influence of the oil project benefits from a *Plan de Relaciones Comunitarias* [Plan of Communitarian Relations – PRC] which is defined in the same way as the social compensation.

[38] Although rarely further than primary and secondary education.
[39] Among which fifteen Quichua communities.
[40] Interview with the Director of Communitarian Relations, headquarters of PAM, Quito, August 2014.

Figure 7: Zone of 'direct influence' of the ITT oil project in the Lower Napo River[41]



Source: secretariat of Hydrocarbons (2014)

A socio-environmental diagnosis was conducted in the ITT, showing risks of contamination (air, water and noise), deforestation, impacts on hunting and fishing, flora and fauna[42]. The ITT is an easily flooded zone, oil spills will be more difficult to clean and the toxic water produced during the process more difficult to store. Moreover, the low quality of oil in the ITT (14 API grades) means that it will require more energy to be processed[43]. Thus, due to the environmentally and socially particularly sensible character of the ITT, the argument of the 'high technology' translates into the use of multilateral extraction, certain materials, and both helicopter and road transportation to limit the colonisation of the area, together with more

[41] The ITT block is presented in red. The map shows the three oil platforms and the sixteen Quichua communities.
[42] Interview Secretariat of Hydrocarbons Staff, Quito, August 2014.
[43] Interview ex-President of Petroecuador, Quito August 2014.

frequent controls from the MAE[44]. This should limit the environmental impact, which cannot be suppressed[45]. The state of the environment in the zone of direct influence of the ITT project, and the potential impacts and solutions are summarised in the EIA and *Plan de Manejo Ambiental* (Environmental Management Plan – PMA), which in the ITT were created by private socio-environmental consultancies which are subcontracted by PAM[46].

The process of *consulta previa* [prior consultation] was carried out for the block between November 21st and December 27th 2013. During that process, the communities were informed about the project and its potential impacts (and benefits), were asked their opinions about it[47] and expressed by a vote whether they were in favour or against oil extraction in their territories[48]. Two new processes of consultation would take place during my stay, in August 2016 regarding the extension of the ITT block into 4 new platforms in the Quichua community of Boca Tiputini, and in February 2017 for a new seismic study in blocks ITT and 31.

Destruction of the local people through the destruction of their environment

The polarisation of the Ecuadorian society around the project can be explained by different levels of trust in the government, notably in the argument of the 'high technology' and in the possibility of mitigation (Martinez Sastre, 2014; Vallejo, 2014). More importantly, at the core of the discord is a different assumption on incommensurability between environmental impacts and social compensation. For the Director of EE in Orellana, whom I interviewed during my first fieldwork in 2014, the local communities will be better-off with the ITT oil project: "There

[44] Interview MAE, Quito August 2014.
[45] All the state actors I interviewed in the summer of 2014 agreed on that fact, except the planning manager of EE (interview Quito in August 2014) who argued that there was no damage anymore with oil extraction.
[46] The EIA and PMA are public documents. I could thus access them for both the extension of the ITT block into 4 new platforms in Boca Tiputini in 2016 and the new seismic study in blocks ITT and 31 in 2017. I give more details of those two extensions in the methods chapter.
[47] These opinions are systematised by the government in a document called 'summary of prior consultation', which I could not access despite an official request to the Secretariat of Hydrocarbons. I was given access, however, to all the observations of the inhabitants of Santa Rosa, Vicente Salazar and Llanchama (three of the sixteen Quichua communities mentioned above) during the process of *consulta* regarding the new seismic study in blocks ITT and 31 in 2017.
[48] Whether oil is extracted or not remains a decision of the Ecuadorian State.

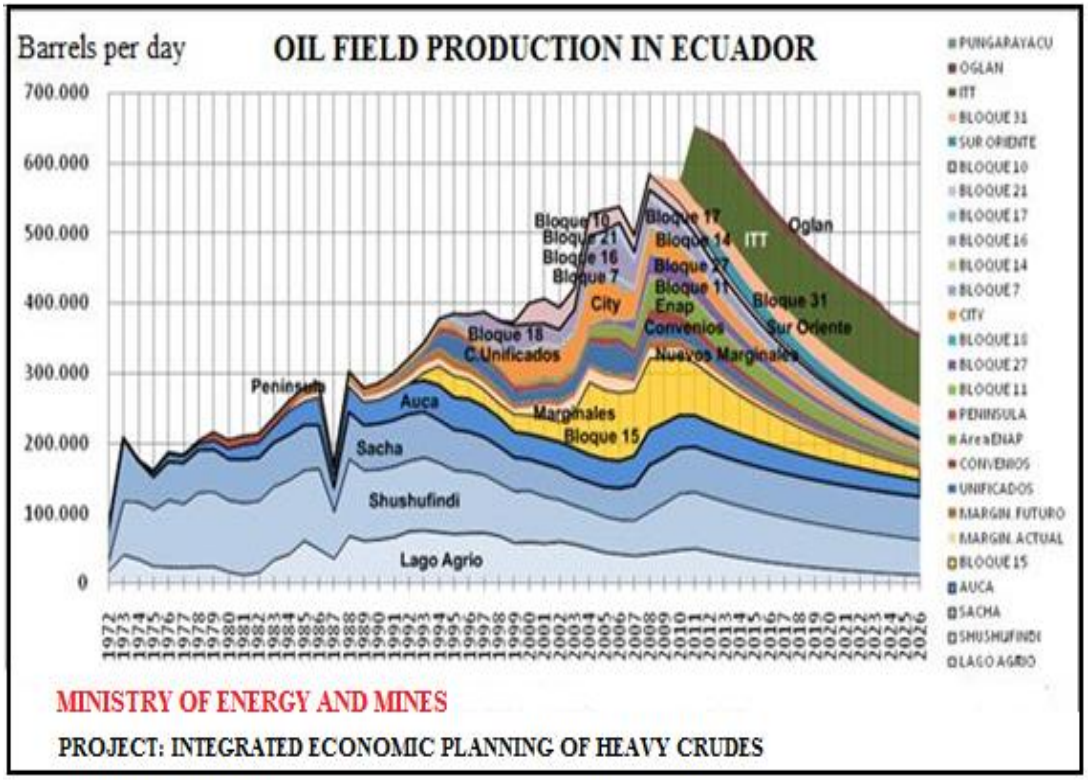
will always be some environmental damage but it will be minimal. The benefits will be higher. People will be better-off with oil extraction"[49]. On the other hand, many people are sceptical of the ability of economic and social investments to make the local indigenous people better-off if the environment is damaged. They point to social impacts which can simply not be controlled for[50], or involve changing the ways of life of the local people[51], sometimes by displacing them[52]. They go in the sense of Acosta et al. who, in 2009, argued that "opening the park [YNP] up to oil companies would lead to the same processes observed time after time throughout the Amazon – destruction of local communities through the degradation of their environment" (2009: 4).

For the counternarrative, the 'standard narrative' prevented from finding 'middle grounds'. Most importantly, both the standard and the counternarratives overlook the questions of how and why indigenous people [with mixed values] might accept an oil extraction project in their territories [when faced with incommensurable trade-offs] and what it entails for them to do so. The question is still open in Ecuador, and is of utter importance in a political context where the measures of mitigation and redistribution implemented by the Ecuadorian State could be interpreted as a new 'middle ground' between indigenous people, the oil companies and the state, while the right to prior consultation could legitimise extractive activities in indigenous territories. It is all the more important in a context where the benefits of oil extraction in terms of the economic development of Ecuador remain to be proven, while the search for alternatives – which have been defended for many years by Ecuadorian Economists such as Carlos Larrea and Alberto Acosta (Acosta et al., 2009; Gudynas & Acosta, 2010; Larrea, 2013; Larrea, 2014a) – is made more realistic by the fast decline in the oil reserves in the country (see Figure

[49] Interview August 2014.
[50] Interview former Minister of the Environment and President of the World Wide Fund (WWF), August 2014.
[51] Interview Advisor to the Prefect of Pastaza; and member of the *Yasunidos*, August 2014.
[52] Interview member of the *Yasunidos*, August 2014.

8) and by the volatility of oil prices (which could hamper the profitability of oil extraction in the ITT fields), in a global context of unprecedented ecological crisis.

Figure 8: Evolution of oil production in Ecuador



Source: Larrea and Warnars (2009)

Chapter 3. Travelling up and down the Napo River: an embedded investigation of oil across time and space (Methodology chapter)

Introduction

August 2016, in Carlos Larrea's offices in the Universidad Andina. I have arrived in Quito, the capital city, some ten days ago and I am planning to stay some more days, to settle and refine my research strategy before travelling to the Amazon and the Napo River. I am discussing my plan with Carlos, an Ecuadorian Economist, specialist of the oil question (its economic, social and environmental impacts in particular), former technical advisor for the government (during the Yasuní-ITT initiative) and convinced that his country has to urgently stop extracting oil. I had met Carlos during my first field trip in 2014. Blanca, a German student of his – but also an environmental activist and CEO of a small tourism company in Missahualli – enters the office in a hurry. She has important and urgent news, she says. There is a new *consulta previa* in the ITT. The oil block will be extended into four new platforms in the community of Boca Tiputini (one of the two communities where I was in 2014) and the *consulta* is happening in four days. Blanca shows us pictures of the invitations which were sent to the communities. Carlos introduces me to her and I explain that I am planning to travel soon to the area, to start my fieldwork on the responses of the Quichua inhabitants to oil extraction in their territories.

You have to go now! she exclaims. You can go with the provincial council. They are going to the *consulta* and they have a fast boat to get there (4 hours instead of 10 from Coca). I can put you in touch with Ernesto.

I knew Ernesto, the Advisor to the Prefect of Orellana and member of *Pachakutik*. I had also met him in 2014, in Francisco de Orellana and several other times during my first field trip[53].

[53] In Puyo in particular, the capital of the Pastaza Pronvince, in the context of the *Consorcio de Gobiernos Provinciales de la Amazonia* (Consortium of Amazonian Provincial Governments – CONGA) – an Amazonian summit where he was presenting his case against oil extraction in the Amazon.

The opportunity was unmissable. Two days later, I took the bus from Quito to Francisco de Orellana (also called Coca), the largest city and capital of the Orellana province. And three days later I embarked on a boat with Ernesto, two other men from the provincial council, and our Quichua driver, Federico, down the Napo River from Coca to Tiputini, the small village I had discovered during my first trip to Ecuador, two years before – in the summer of 2014.

I would spend the next five and a half months (on and off) in the *ribera* – and the next 7 months in Ecuador (until the end of March 2017). In this chapter, I explain what I did during my time in Ecuador and how it translated, months later, into the present thesis. I explain, in particular, how and why I moved away from abstract and formal methods such as interviews to privilege concrete and repeated conversations, embedded in people's daily lives, how and why I decided to 'follow the boats' (to different communities) rather than staying in one Quichua community and, finally, how and why I slowly let go of my specific (and often abstract) focus on oil decisions to investigate the topic indirectly, through various apparently unrelated (but concrete) aspects of people's lives, issues and aspirations, and conflicts with state institutions.

I finally explain how those three main changes – methods, place and focus – resulted, during the writing process, in a 'dynamic' (embedded in time and space), 'indirect' (embedded in the broader process of change at play in the ribera) and 'concrete' (embedded in people's daily lives) investigation of oil decisions, oil (valuation) struggles and oil development.

Figures 9 and 10: In the boat with Ernesto and Federico (first picture) and the harbour of Tiputini, the village (second picture)





Source: the author

1. Carried away by the boats – three main shifts during the first exploratory month (September)

Stuck in the village

My first two days in the *ribera* were filled with the *consulta previa,* in the Quichua community of Boca Tiputini and Nuevo Rocafuerte, the second village of the *ribera*, where I met with the workers and consultants from the oil company, local and national state actors such as delegates from the Ministry of the Environment, the Secretariat of Hydrocarbons, but also the Municipality of Aguarico [Mayor and council members] in addition to the Provincial council of Orellana I had been travelling with, the priests (capuchin missionaries) of the *ribera*, who have been established in Nuevo Rocafuerte for more than 40 years, and the Quichua and *mestizo* inhabitants from the two villages and communities – all at once during these two events where everyone seemed to be wondering what a white young woman was doing among the Quichua attendees. Following the two days of consultation, I stayed in Tiputini, the central village of 500 inhabitants where most of those actors, who had travelled from Quito, were staying too – to be able to discuss with them before they left the following day. I spent the next few days in the village – temporarily, I thought, the time to decide which of the surrounding communities I would choose to conduct my study during the next 4 months – while the intense activity which had followed the consultation started to slow down.

There are no roads, from Pompeya to Nuevo Rocafuerte. The only way to travel from Tiputini to the communities, and between communities, is by the river. There are no organised trips, except the *turno,* a collective boat[54] which runs daily between Nuevo Rocafuerte and Coca, the capital of the Orellana Province situated 300 kilometres up the river (a 7 to 10-hour trip) and leaves you anywhere along the road but does not take detours[55]. Apart from that, there are only

[54] Managed by EP Municipal y la Compañía Rocafuerte de transporte Fluvial, KAMOKAMO y Orellana (two cooperatives) [*Plan de manejo* Vicente Salazar 2016 p11].

[55] Another option is the school boat which comes from the communities to Tiputini in the morning and goes back to the communities in the afternoon.

individuals with their canoes, coming back and forth to Tiputini for *trámites* [administrative procedures] and shopping. Most of the inhabitants do not have their own canoe, though, and depend on other people for their travels. Moreover, petrol is scarce and two to three times more expensive than in the rest of the country. As a result, mobilisation is a daily issue for the inhabitants, and it is not uncommon to see people waiting hours and hours in the harbour of Tiputini for someone to give them a lift – an experience I became familiar with during my stay.

In addition to the absence of a means to travel anywhere (I was dependent on people's good will to take me with them), I had no point of entry yet. I could not go and interview people about oil without talking to the President of the community first, and the Quichua territories are sometimes so large that it can take some hours walking from the *centro poblado* [populated centre of the community] to some of the houses, and meeting the President. Moreover, I had no place to stay and would need to find a way to go back to Tiputini before the night. I just could not go by myself. Beyond the logistical difficulties, I was not sure where to go and the idea of going to people's houses to "interview" them felt like an intrusion[56]. I was not even sure my questions would make sense to them. I needed to explore first. Tiputini, where many of the Quichua people from the communities travel frequently or even have a house in the village, where all the *mestizos*, oil workers, and local state officials live, where the institutions, shops and *comedores*[57] are situated, and where I could talk to people (casually) all day long before starting the real investigation, was a good place for that.

One evening, at the end of August, I decided to go and talk to Juan Manuel, a *mestizo* and *montubio*[58] but also *socio*[59] of the community of Vicente Salazar. I had met Juan the day before the prior consultation. Juan is a councilman but does not really work in the Municipality.

[56] Field notes 3/09/2016.
[57] *Comedores* refer to small places (restaurants) where people it daily, the local food which has been prepared by the owner of the restaurant, in this case (Tiputini) often a woman. They translate as dining rooms in English.
[58] The *montubios* in Ecuador are *mestizos* of peasant origin from the coast.
[59] Approved member of the community over 18 years old.

Member of the *Pachakutik* political party, openly opposed to both the party and person of the Mayor, Felix (who is not only '*Alianza país* '[60] but happens to be the ex-husband of his mother-in-law), he has set up his own office at the back of his house, which allows him receiving the Quichua people from the surrounding communities to talk about personal, administrative and legal matters. Juan studied Law at University and, although he never finished his bachelor, he is considered the *abogado* [Lawyer] of the communities. He travels to different communities during their *asambleas*[61], to help the inhabitants with administrative and legal matters. The Municipality does not know what Juan does in the communities. As he would tell me a few days later, on the boat to Chiro Isla, another Quichua community: 'I come here out of personal initiative. I used to tell the Municipality, but they would discount me a day of work. For political reasons. So now, I tell them that I am going to the communities to do *fiscalisación* [audit]'[62]. Working already on his electoral campaign at the time of my fieldwork, Juan would eventually become the Mayor of Aguarico in May 2019.

After a short and formal 'interview' on the little table outside of his cement house, we had a long conversation about the communities, their problems, needs and aspirations as he perceived them, the presence of the oil companies, as well as development alternatives for the *ribera*, his role as an outsider (who had married a Quichua woman and had become a *socio* of Vicente Salazar) and my role as a researcher. Juan Manuel understood very quickly that he could make some 'use' of my presence, and invited me to go with him to the next *asamblea* of his community, Vicente Salazar. 'Vicente Salazar, he told me, is struggling to obtain legal status. We are writing a *plan de manejo* [management plan], and it would be useful if you could have a look at it.'[63]. Vicente Salazar, one of the closest communities to the village (3 kilometres)

[60] *Alianza país* (the party of the government) for many years, Felix turned to *Movimiento Creo* in January 2017, the party of presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso – who lost the elections against Lenin Moreno in April 2017.
[61] Monthly gathering between the *socios* to discuss different matters of the community.
[62] Conversation 1/09/2016.
[63] Conversation 28/08/2016.

[see map below – Vicente Salazar is the small beige community on the left side] and with a road connexion to it, is situated outside the ITT block: there was no oil extraction there in September 2016, although rumours already spoke of a new seismic study starting within months and overlapping its territory. Moreover, Vicente Salazar has the particularity of counting 40 per cent of *mestizos* among its inhabitants[64] – which was not particularly attractive to my research plan. Curious and relatively 'unemployed' otherwise, although aware that it would not be my main site of investigation, I naturally followed Juan to the *asamblea* after reading the legal document which was going to be discussed.

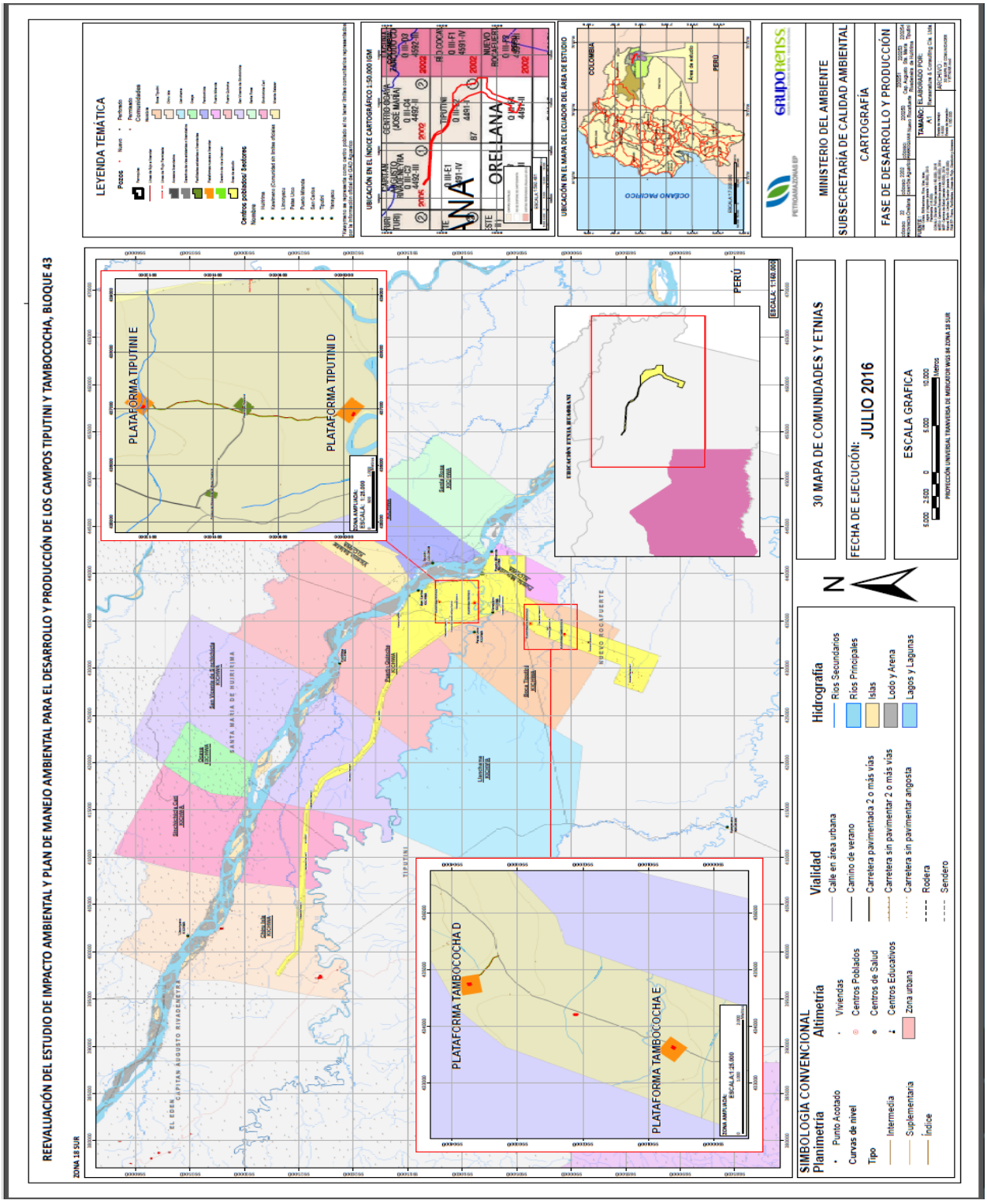
Figure 11: View of Tiputini from Juan's house, at the heart of the village



Source: the author

[64] When Vicente Salazar was formed they needed more people. Due to its closeness to Tiputini, the village, they encouraged *mestizos* to join the community as *socios* – resulting in the community being made of 40% of *mestizos* today, an exception in the *ribera*.

Figure 12: 'Mapa de Comunidades y Etnias' (map of communities and ethnic groups)



Source: Petroamazonas[65] 2016

[65] As pointed out by Amelia, a Lawyer working for the *Fundación Alejandro Labaka* (FAL) during an 'indigenous leaders meeting' in Nuevo Rocafuerte [26/11/2016], the only institution in Ecuador which produces good maps of the Quichua territories of the Lower Napo River – that is, where they are represented as actual territories (rather than 'points', as in figure 7, which comes from the Ecuadorian Secretariat of Hydrocarbons) – is the oil firm. The map above was created by Grupo Renss, subcontractor of PAM, as part of the EIA.

Figure 13: On our way to Chiro Isla with Juan Manuel and two other council members through the Napo River



Source: the author

Tour of the asambleas with Juan Manuel

The event proved instructive, and I was invited to join the next *asamblea* of the community. Some days after Vicente Salazar, Juan took me to Chiro Isla (a two-hour boat journey from Tiputini, further up the river and inside both the ITT block and block 31, an older oil block which started being exploited in 2000), where the *socios* were going to debate the reform of the *estatuto de la comunidad* [legal status of the community] – a collective discussion of the communitarian rules written when the community was created, in 1999, which Juan would help moderating. On September 9th, Juan introduced me to Sergio, the President of Samona (another community further up the river, outside of the ITT block but also part of block 31) and suggested that I go and give English classes to the children of the community. Three days later,

I embarked on a boat with the people from the Municipality, who were invited to the *asamblea* to discuss what would increasingly capture my interest and which I would call the "water conflict" (surrounding the payment for the newly provided drinking water plant). And on September 11th, I was on Juan's motorcycle, this time to Santa Rosa, another Quichua community outside of the ITT block, six kilometres and further down the river from Tiputini (with a road connection to the village), where the inhabitants were debating the investment plan from state conservation programme *Socio Bosque* – i.e. making collective decisions on how to invest the money received as part of their participation in the programme.

After a few days in Tiputini, it had become common practice for me to follow Juan on his expeditions to the different communities. This proved to be a very useful compromise. Every encounter with a new community was fascinating and felt like I was exactly in the right place to make progress on my research: where I was going with Juan was where people gathered, things happened, and issues were debated and discussed between the *socios* of the communities. The *asambleas* are also privileged spaces to witness encounters between the communities and the state. In that sense, what was first a constrained decision found a real justification in terms of my research strategy: the boats, which I first saw as a limitation to my movements, seemed to take me exactly to the right places, and I ended up seeing this logistical limitation as an opportunity to filter interesting places, events and encounters. Moreover, I was observing and listening without having to present myself or my research (not totally clear to myself anymore – and yet) in a clear way to the inhabitants. Indeed, Juan would always present me as some sort of collaborator, or just a student interested in listening and who could potentially help with something later. I could be a 'spy', and this effectively solved my issue of 'access' at a moment when I thought it was too early to present myself or my research in a formal way. I learnt a lot from the different events, while observing and remaining silent. Many different topics (and 'problems') started to capture my interest, alongside oil extraction: agriculture, communitarian

tourism, *Socio Bosque* and drinking water provision (all the source of various complaints, failures and conflict) and more generally the 'needs' and aspirations of the inhabitants, the understanding of which I could already sense would be crucial to my understanding of people's decisions over the oil extraction project – one among many 'problems' the Quichua inhabitants of the communities have to deal with, and sometimes a solution to some of those problems.

After the *asambleas*, I would always have some kind of interaction with the inhabitants – being careful to adapt my methods to the group dynamics I had been able to observe during the *asamblea,* while tailoring my questions to the specific issues of the community and what had just been discussed. I also reframed my questions and methods from community to community, learning from what had not worked in the previous ones. At that stage, my questions were mostly a pretext to create an interaction with the inhabitants in order to identify the next stages and methods[66] and, importantly, identifying the people who would become my informants and friends later. This last step was facilitated by the fact that, in each community there were always one or two extremely welcoming people, who would talk to me spontaneously and openly, seemingly both intrigued and excited about the presence of a foreigner in the monthly gathering. This was the case of Adriana, an elderly woman in Santa Rosa, who sat next to me during the *asamblea* and kept commenting on what was happening while explaining the context for me to understand – to an extent where I struggled to follow what was being said in the meeting. Such context had to do with issues specific to her community (but also, I would increasingly realise, common to all the Quichua communities of the *ribera*), such as the need for cash and lack of alternatives to obtain regular one, failed development programmes by the state (either because the money is not coming or is monopolised by a small group within the community), stories of corruption, divisions of the *socios* about how to deal with outsiders (state, NGOs or oil

[66] I would ask myself: what is interesting in this community? What is puzzling? What would I like to explore further? And how can I do so?

company and even Quichua people from outside the community) and rules coming from outside (on hunting and fishing, how to invest money, fiscal issues and payment for basic services, etc.), failures of democracy, lack of solidarity, free ride and the '*ambición personal'* [personal greed] of some *socios*, legalisation problems, the loss of the Quichua traditions, the lack of education, lack of formal health facilities and lack of job opportunities in the *ribera*.

Adriana enthusiastically introduced those issues to me and was similarly eager to tell me about the struggles she faces as a Quichua person, and as an elderly woman in her community. She would subsequently invite me to her house. She would also introduce me to her nephew, Edgar, and his wife Cristal, who would later take me to their own house, introduce me to Edgar's parents, and become two of my main informants in the community. I would meet Edgar and Cristal very frequently in the village, Tiputini, where they had a second house.

This is just one example of the many key encounters I made during those early events, with people I would go back to and sometimes meet on a daily basis, in Santa Rosa and Vicente Salazar especially, both on the same bank of the river as Tiputini, with a road access to the village and a daily school bus between the village and communities – driven by Johnny, a *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar who would also become a key informant and a friend – thus with relatively easy access from the village where I was still staying.

Figure 14: Cristal in her *finca* in Santa Rosa (first picture); Edgar, Cristal, and their grandson on the Napo River (second picture)





Source: the author

These events also greatly helped me learn how to approach the Quichua inhabitants; including questions of consent, how to introduce myself [and my research], what to talk about, how to interact and which methods to use. In particular, I gave up on written consent after my experience in Chiro Isla, where the President seemed not only uncomfortable but mildly panicked at the idea of signing a document [something the Presidents of the communities are sometimes asked to do in the context of their interactions with the oil company], while people were often eager to speak in more informal settings. From then on, I used a mix of oral consent (individual and collective) when the setting was formal, and simply discussing when the process of asking for consent seemed to create a barrier rather than foster exchange.

All in all, this exploratory month allowed me getting to know the issues of the communities – and the specific issues of each – and slowly making contact with the inhabitants, while still looking for the ideal setting to conduct the research I had planned. I was, at the same time, constantly discussing my research with Juan, who happened to be trying and answer some of the puzzles which were emerging for me; in particular the broad and main following one (in

my own framing, drawing on Escobar 2008) – how to reach 'difference-in-equality' (i.e. how to provide the communities with 'equality' without denying their 'difference'?) – which quite clearly seemed to be the common shortfall of all 'development' alternatives in the *ribera*, from state conservation programme, NGO tourism initiative, agricultural projects or oil extraction project, to the provision of health, education and basic services. I would meet with Juan[67] on a daily basis during my stay in the *ribera* (August 2016 to February 2017) and take note of some 37 conversations I had with him. I would also spend countless hours in the office at the back of his house, listening to and witnessing his discussions with the Quichua and *mestizo* inhabitants of the communities who had come, getting introduced to many of them, sometimes interviewing them and more often simply discussing with them. While some of the 'data' I gathered through Juan is directly translated and analysed in the thesis (or used to make sense of other data I gathered), most of it will simply remain, as is the case with other key encounters I made in Ecuador, an invaluable source of the most precious kind of information, which challenged and reshaped forever my understanding of oil extraction but also questions of poverty, culture and development in indigenous territories of the Ecuadorian Amazon.

Frustrations

By the end of September, I had attended two days of *consulta previa* in Boca Tiputini and Nuevo Rocafuerte, the official inauguration of block 43 (ITT) by Vice-President Jorge Glas (and other people from the government, PAM, and indigenous organizations), seven *asambleas* in five different communities, one *minga*[68], and the anniversary of the creation of the community of Alta Florencia. Following the *mingas* and *asambleas*, I had organised rounds of collective conversations in three communities and discussed informally with the inhabitants in the other ones. I had made contact with some of the oil workers and followed them three times

[67] I often refer to Juan Manuel as Juan in the empirical story.
[68] Weekly or monthly gathering between the *socios* of the community to carry some communitarian work (agricultural, cleaning, painting, building, etc.). Can be translated as work party.

during their one-day trip to three different communities as part of the process of prior consultation – the first time for a workshop in Puerto Miranda, the second time for the *mesa de información* [information desk] in Boca Tiputini and the third time to interview the President of Chiro Isla on the social component of the oil extraction project.

I had had many informal conversations (and conducted some formal interviews – both collective and individual) with the *mestizo* and Quichua inhabitants of the communities [in Tiputini], but also with key *mestizo* informants in Tiputini – including Juan Manuel, the Mayor, and other people from the Municipality, the school and health centre, and the oil workers, whom I would meet daily in the communities and the village (in the Colombian *comedor* especially, where I would also hear all the gossip from the village and communities). I had, finally, spent a fair amount of my time hanging out, playing dominos and preparing milkshakes with Lover, the newly arrived milkshake maker from the west coast who had immediately become my friend and whose incredible social skills gave me easy access to the people of Tiputini – Quichua and *mestizos*, farmers, oil workers and local state officials, old and young, men and women, inhabitants and visitors alike.

While I was busy with *asambleas*, my research was moving very fast: I would interact with many people, take loads of notes and have a lot of ideas. But when I suddenly did not have any event to attend for a couple of days in a row, I felt stuck. While Tiputini was fascinating and boiling, full of people to talk to and ideas to explore, I started to feel like I had exhausted its possibilities after a few weeks and was ready to put the initial plan into place (go to one community to investigate oil decisions). Moreover, my exploratory strategy did not come without some difficulties which I started to face by mid-September already.

First, following the boats often meant following Juan, which in this very political setting and village was a source of tensions with the Mayor and the oil workers[69], all from the political party of the government (*Alianza País*), which I had not necessarily anticipated or thought through. Oil is a very political topic in Ecuador, and oil extraction in the ITT fields a particularly sensitive one. While I tried to counterbalance this by following both the *municipio* [Municipality] and the oil workers in their day trips to the communities (I went to Samona and Fronteras del Ecuador with the former, and to Boca Tiputini, Puerto Miranda and Chiro Isla with the latter) whenever that was possible, this created a different sort of tension with the Quichua inhabitants, who sometimes initially (and logically) thought I was from the government or the company, after seeing me with the guys in blue jeans[70]. Both being perceived as against oil extraction and on the side of the company were problematic and I slowly learnt about the importance of introducing myself as a student – who had come from France to understand the perceptions of the inhabitants of the communities of oil extraction and had no pre-established opinion on oil extraction – while making clear my research was independent (from any political party, interest or institution) and confidential.

I also started to feel scattered and exhausted, as a result of this exploratory and mobile strategy. What I had envisioned as a transitory phase which would allow me deciding where to go and conduct what I still considered to be my 'real' investigation (in-depth and structured investigation of oil decisions in one community) was starting to feel like a never-ending exploration, over-stimulating for my body and my mind which were constantly carried away – (physically) by the boats and (mentally) by the new topics and problems I was discovering (most of which were, of course, fascinating). I increasingly felt the need to stay longer in one

[69] After I had initially arrived to the *consulta previa* with a boat from the provincial council ['*Pachakutik'*], the oil workers invited me for lunch to check I was not from the *Yasunidos*. I later learnt they were spying on me, both in the communities and in Quito. Although my relationships with them were mostly friendly after a while and on a daily basis, they would sometimes be reluctant to be formally interviewed.
[70] The oil workers all and always wear blue jeans in Tiputini and the communities.

place, observe and listen deeper, and build trust with the inhabitants. I also felt like I needed to bring my focus back on oil decisions (and on the ITT oil project) more directly – which I had been losing as a result of following the boats, people and events. In particular, the two most easily accessible communities from Tiputini, Santa Rosa and Vicente Salazar, where I had been spending most of my time and of which I had the clearest picture so far, were both outside the ITT block. The main topics of discussion there were agriculture, tourism, *Socio Bosque*… and the absence of oil extraction. Such absence and the related frustration (of being affected by the oil project without benefiting from the jobs, money and 'social compensation'), coupled with the fact the communities did not officially know about the new seismic study which would be coming to their territories some months later[71], rendered the topic problematic and difficult to address. The inhabitants were simply tired of being asked their opinions about oil extraction (as they had been a few months earlier by the oil company) without seeing the company enter their territories and without seeing the benefits. My own frustration was exacerbated as I arrived in Samona and realised I had been 'sent' to a community which was not even inside the ITT oil block but its neighbouring – and older – block (31), which had started much earlier and no longer seemed to be a main topic of conversation among the inhabitants.

The resentment and opinions of the communities next to but outside the ITT block would become, much later, crucial in my understanding of people's decisions on oil extraction (as I show in chapter 5). In a similar way, Samona would become a theatre for my understanding of what happens in the oil development process, after the benefits (drinking water in this case) have been provided (and this is the main topic of chapter 6). Back in September 2016, though, it simply felt like I needed to study oil decisions more directly.

[71] During our first trip to Vicente Salazar, Juan had asked me not to mention the coming seismic study, because the inhabitants were not aware of it, according to him: 'now they are thinking of preserving their culture, Juan had told me, but if they know they will think of their economic interest'.

Figure 15: *Consulta previa* (day 1 in Boca Tiputini and day 2 in Nuevo Rocafuerte)





Source: Petroamazonas

Figure 16: Jorge Glas in the Tiputini harbour (first picture); Jorge Glas and the Mayor in the Municipality of Aguarico (second picture), September 2016[72]





Source: Joel, staff from the municipio

[72] The vice-president would be arrested and 'sentenced to six years in jail in connection with corruption at the Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht' (BBC News 2017) the following year.

Figure 17: Tour of the communities with the Municipality (here in Fronteras del Ecuador)



Source: someone from the municipio

Figure 18: Lover, the milkshake maker from the west coast



Source: the author

2. Swimming against the current: a series of informative failures

After a first exploratory month (from August 24th to September 22nd 2016), I had to go back to Quito for visa reasons[73]. As I returned to Tiputini, mid-October, with a clearer idea of how to present myself and my research – although still unsure where to go and what to ask, afraid to get stuck in the wrong place or ask the wrong questions, but determined to 'make things happen' and accelerate progress on my understanding of people's perceptions of oil and oil decisions – I decided to shift my strategy. During the November *asamblea* in the community of Boca Tiputini, a Quichua community situated in front of Tiputini and inside the ITT block, where I had been in 2014 already and where I was following the boats from Tiputini once a month to attend the monthly event[74], I gathered some courage, introduced myself formally in front of all the inhabitants, the oil workers and people from the Municipality (including Juan) who were attending the event, and asked the inhabitants whether they would agree for me to go from house to house and interview them about oil extraction.

Failure of formal/abstract interviewing

The *asamblea* reacted very well and the *socios* told me they would happily open their doors and answer my questions. I felt both surprised by their reaction and relieved to finally have introduced myself formally in front of everyone – including the oil workers who from then on started to discuss with me more openly. Juan, who had predicted a number of times that the

[73] My daily life in Quito was more embedded in my research than ever, as I was staying between Carlos Larrea's (the Ecuadorian Economist) and Humberto's (the CEO of a consultancy working for PAM and other oil companies I had met during my first two days in the ribera, during the *consulta previa* in Nuevo Rocafuerte and Boca Tiputini) – the platform from where I would go and interview academics, people from the oil company, from different state institutions, indigenous organisations and NGOs (ecology and human rights), spend time in the University (Andina) and in the little house hosting *Acción Ecológica* and its staff, meet and talk to Humberto's friends (consultants and state actors involved in extractive activities) and Carlos' students (environmental activists) alike. All those conversations and interviews shaped the present thesis and my understanding of the topic in countless ways, although they are often not directly included in the text.

[74] As part of my exploratory stage, I was attending the monthly *asambleas* of the community of Boca Tiputini, situated inside the ITT block and in front of the village, Tiputini, on the other bank of the river which many people would cross on that special day – including the oil workers, the Mayor, Juan Manuel, and the *socios* of the community who lived in the village.

inhabitants would not let me in or give information unless I had something to give in return, acknowledged that because they had seen me many times in the *asamblea*, because I had accepted the *chicha*[75] they had been offering to me, and because I had introduced myself formally now, the inhabitants started to trust me. I finally had a point of entry in the ITT block. The initial logistical constraints were somehow eased by the fact I knew more and more people from Boca Tiputini who travelled back and forth between the village and the community and were willing to take me on board. It still took some seven attempts before I actually managed to go to the community by myself, at the end of November, for a couple of days in a row – after the inhabitants who had offered to take me there had changed their plans, the six previous times.

As I started going from house to house, with the questions I had prepared prior to fieldwork[76] and largely updated throughout my first exploratory month[77], the experience slowly and increasingly confirmed my early intuition that I would not go very far by interviewing people formally in their houses[78]. First, I did not know the inhabitants of Boca Tiputini very well, and it felt very unnatural and intrusive to enter their house and ask them to talk to me about what I had decided to talk about. I knew, from my experience in the different *asambleas*, that they had urgent and concrete issues to deal with – quite remote from my questions about oil extraction

[75] Traditional beverage made of fermented yucca.

[76] The interviews I had prepared were both semi-structured, and in-depth. This means that my questions, although previously prepared, could evolve during the interviews depending on what the interviewee wanted to talk about (Blee & Taylor, 2002). In-depth interviews, in turn, allow the respondents to define the problem in their own terms and to take into account contradictions and ambiguities (Brannen, 1988), which is particularly useful to analyse perceptions and values.

[77] See Checkel (2006) on this.

[78] By mid-September already, I thought interviews would lead nowhere: 'failure of the interviews' [field notes 13/09/2016]. While asking questions in Santa Rosa about the communitarian tourism project, I realised that I would learn much more by attending a negotiation between the community and NGO in charge of the project, than by asking questions in the abstract. Two days later, while reformulating on paper an interview I had prepared for the inhabitants of Boca Tiputini, I wrote, again: 'it's impossible to capture what I want to understand through interviews. I need to spend time (a lot of time) with them, and talk about things of their daily lives' [field notes, 15/09/2016]. On September 17th, I decided not to take the school bus for Santa Rosa, where I had planned to go from house to house to interview people. I wrote: 'I don't think intruding myself in people's houses without having been invited can bring anything good. At worst, it will close me doors. I need more pretexts, such as encounters between the communities and outsiders, which I could attend'. And in November, I finally wrote: 'It's become clear that you can't understand a Quichua person whatsoever by doing an interview. However in-depth the questions are'. [field notes 7/11/2016]

– and I suddenly felt a strong sense of lack of legitimacy, while sitting there in their houses with my questionnaire and notebook. I could not be here unless it was to support them, in a way or another, or at least listen to them on topics they wanted to talk about. The contrast with my conversations following the *asambleas* in the different communities I had been (and was still) travelling to was striking. From welcoming, open, eager to speak, intrigued and curious, offering *chicha* and thanking me for listening to them while asking when I would come back, the inhabitants had suddenly become uncomfortable and shy, seemingly bored and relatively closed. I increasingly felt like a stranger who had come to 'extract' information and quite clearly did not have anything to give in exchange – rather than a visitor from a foreign country who had come with open mind and heart to experience and share different ways of understanding the world, as I often felt in the other communities.

The information I managed to gather was equally disappointing, and it was very clear that I had been learning much more from the unplanned conversations with the inhabitants of the communities where I had previously travelled, or from the people I was meeting on a daily basis in Tiputini. The very act of 'interviewing' was inadequate in this setting. People were eager to tell me about their lives, their problems and their aspirations. They would shut down when I 'interviewed' them formally and asked direct questions about oil extraction. I still did not know what oil decisions were made of and was not ready to tailor my questions to the specific contexts and people I had in front of me. The risk was obviously missing a great part of the picture, through the interview, but also to annoy and bore my respondents very deeply. I felt like I still needed to explore much more before being able to ask the right questions.

I realised – later – that the main issue had to do with the 'abstract' character of my interviews – as opposed to the embeddedness of my conversations with the inhabitants, in concrete events of their lives, in the previous communities. Questions like 'Would you like to live in a city?' or 'What is the Quichua culture for you?', too abstract, almost never gave me any insightful

information. I found that very precise exercises and concrete questions gave much more interesting results – all the more when they referred to something which had just been discussed in the *asamblea*. As Jackson puts it, 'without a context in which knowledge can be placed, a goal against which its usefulness can be gauged, the questions of the ethnographer are seen as pointless. Any answer will do. What difference does it make?' (1987: 9).

In the same way, situations of conflict triggered much more answers than abstract questions. This would be confirmed over and again in the subsequent months of my fieldwork, and one particular illustration of this would include discussions in Vicente Salazar around the concrete plan of the *municipio* to gather the inhabitants of the community as a *pueblo* [village] (as a condition to provide them with the electricity), illuminating of people's perceptions of the city and the village as opposed to the community and, at another level, containing deep insights regarding the remaining and changing relationship with the land (thus, indirectly, with the oil project) – much more than I could have learnt and understood through abstract questions about those topics. It is now obvious to me that one cannot understand people's relationship to (and valuation of) the land by asking them, that such valuation is never more visible than when the land is actually threatened (by pollution, time constraints or space re-organisation), in the same way as people's ambivalent stances about the city never appear more clearly than when the prospect of emigrating there (or gathering in small villages) becomes a concrete possibility for them. People's behaviour is not always consistent with their words, sometimes because they do not tell the truth but mostly and much more simply because questions of perception, valuation, values and decision-making are always partly unconscious – and the subjects of inquiry themselves cannot articulate what they are not conscious of. One cannot grasp people's unconscious mechanisms by asking them. Acts say much more than words and, in the same way, spontaneous, concrete and repeated conversations are often richer than responses given

as part of a formal interview setting. The process of interviewing people was not embedded in their lives, and that was the issue I had been sensing before being able to name it.

While this series of interviews in Boca Tiputini is retrospectively illuminating in many ways, it does not have the inductive richness of some other events, places and conversations which really shaped my empirical story and my understanding of oil decisions as embedded in people's daily lives, in a timeframe, and in the broader process of change in the *ribera*. Instead, its content merely comes to confirm, and sometimes enrich or add nuances to what had been discovered in other places. It also importantly helped me understand (and experience) the value of inductive research and reconsider my research focus: the right moment would arise to talk about oil more directly, or oil would no longer be the main focus of my research. Either way, my thesis would have to adapt to this uncomfortable silence. I decided to listen to that, take a step back, slow down and continue observing and listening.

Limits of observation in one place

But observing and listening was useful only when focused on particular events, I would find out later. Following my feeling that it would not have been appropriate in this context, I slowly (and similarly) gave up on my previous idea of staying in just one community. I would later articulate the reasons why, while finally having the opportunity to stay in various communities (first in Samona and later in Bello Horizonte, Puerto Miranda, Puerto Quinche, Boca Tiputini and Yanayacu[79]), in people's houses, each time for 3 to 5 days.

In addition to the logistical complications of going in and out the communities, no one would invite me to stay in their houses once in a community. When I first arrived in Samona, the President gave me a mattress which we put in the cement house of the *centro poblado* where the other teacher, a Quichua man from another community and not-well integrated into this

[79] Yanayacu is part of the community of Boca Tiputini, which is divided into four different 'sectors': Boca Tiputini, Yanayacu, San Carlos and Patas Hurcu.

one, was staying with his wife and spending most of his free time watching TV. Something similar would happen later during my stay in Boca Tiputini where the only house with an extra mattress was the cement house of the teacher of the village – a Quichua woman from Tena – thus also an outsider from the community. During my subsequent stay in Puerto Quinche, the only person who volunteered to have me stay in her house was Belén, a 27-year-old Quichua woman. I was not surprised to learn that Belén, who described herself as having 'another mentality', was also partly an outsider in her own community: she had left when she was young, had married a *mestizo* and had recently come back with him and their two children. They were not *socios* of the community yet. She explained to me why most inhabitants would not invite me to stay in their houses: they were afraid I was going to judge the state of their houses, or not to have enough food for me. These were the exact concerns her mum, Kumanda, had raised as Belén volunteered to have me in her house – to which Belén had responded: 'she is a student, she wants to know how people live and she is not here to judge them'[80]. As Bell and Miller (2002) and George and Bennett (2005) point out, the fact that some people accept to speak while others do not constitutes a potential bias – in my case, toward people with more education and sometimes outsiders in their own communities, as is made clear and transparent throughout the empirical story. Once the initial contact established, however, the use of less formal methods (and conversations) allowed me discussing with a broader range of people. The triangulation of such different perspectives helps me build the empirical story, and the heterogeneity which I found in the communities is one of the objects of inquiry in many chapters.

Once settled in a community, after the logistical complications overcome, the real issue of that fixed kind of strategy would become clear to me: there was barely any community-life in the communities, outside of the relatively rare community events and gatherings (often monthly).

[80] Conversation Belén 10/10/2016.

In Samona, where I initially felt like being a spy in the 'wrong' house (a cement house with an outsider from the community), in the 'wrong' community (oil block 31) and at the 'wrong' time (oil extraction was no longer a topic of conversation), I spent hours in the *centro poblado*, waiting for something to happen or someone to discuss with – only to realise that not much happened on a daily basis, apart from alcoholic gatherings during which people opened much more than usual but where it soon became difficult to have a proper conversation, and which occasionally ended up being quite violent. These initial complications would fade away during my subsequent visits to the community, as my interest shifted from oil extraction to the water conflict – much more present in people's minds and conversations than the oil project – while the inhabitants naturally started to open up, especially during my two last stays in the community. I would finally exchange a lot with two women in particular (which was relatively rare during my stay in the Quichua communities) – Karla, the operator of the water plant, and Marina, the school teacher, both my neighbours in the centre of the community – in addition to Sergio, the President, Ismael, the 'elderly man', Ramiro, an ex-President of the community, some parents of the children I was teaching and some inhabitants particularly involved in the discussions with the Municipality surrounding the payment for drinking water.

Over my next three visits to Samona (and alongside the English classes), I would discuss with the inhabitants in the centre, play football with the women, participate in some of the celebratory gatherings in the centre, break my ankle and experienced the lack of 'health system' in the communities, attend the *asambleas* and *mingas* which happened while I was there (but also the Christmas celebrations and a wedding to which the Mayor was invited too), conduct formal interviews, meet and discuss with the oil workers working in the *Departamento de Relaciones Comunitaria*s (DRC – Department of Communitarian Relations) for block 31, discuss the water conflict with them as well as with the Mayor, the vice-Mayor and Juan Manuel (who had drastically opposed views on the conflict) every time I went back to Tiputini,

but also with the oil workers and inhabitants of Tiputini and the communities of ITT block and Lower Napo River. Those experiences would finally, and later, greatly contribute to my understanding of oil as a dynamic process, since the provision of drinking water as part of the social compensation from oil extraction is also the trigger of a number of subsequent conflicts and struggles in the communities. Travelling back and forth between Samona and Tiputini, and discussing the water conflict in Samona with the inhabitants of Tiputini and the communities, would give a sense of what is likely to happen for them – in the lower part of the river and ITT block – in the subsequent stages of the oil development process. They would also and more concretely allow me writing the third empirical chapter of the thesis (chapter 6).

Back in October 2016, however, I was mainly frustrated by my early experience in Samona, and subsequent visits to Puerto Miranda and Puerto Quinche confirmed the importance of staying mobile – rather than being fixed in one house or even one community, as I had initially planned to do. Despite the richness of my experience at Belén's, who was eager to chat, made me feel home and introduced me to everything she did in very lengthy details from morning to evening – while commenting on the broader situation of the community, her own situation as a part-outsider in her own community and answering all my questions with extreme patience and openness – the experience had fulfilled its purpose after some three days. Belén had given me another opportunity to see and experience life in the communities (and, indirectly, oil decisions) from a different perspective[81] but the setting was no longer conducive to making progress on my research, and in this context, staying longer would not have made much sense.

I realised, through different but similar experiences which brought similar feelings, that the depth and richness of my research had to come not from conducting in-depth interviews or

[81] Belén introduced me, in particular, to the practical and daily consequences of the lack of 'basic services' (such as drinking water, electricity, sewage system and garbage recollection systems) in the communities, from her own perspective, but also to the difficulties associated with provision.

observation in one place, but through mobility and the accumulation of different perspectives – i.e. different people in different places and communities, in different contexts and situations, with different problems and at different stages of the oil extraction project – while using different methods and presenting myself and my research in slightly different ways too.

On January 18th, after three days in the house of Eduardo, the secretary of Puerto Miranda, I confirmed: 'I could not have done an ethnography. Nothing happens in Quichua houses. There is no community life apart from the *mingas, asambleas* and parties.'[82] And on October 13th, I wrote: 'I am moving away from the idea of an ethnography here. Different contexts allow me understanding different aspects of the problem. My work is ethnographic in a way, in the sense that I am not trying to validate pre-established hypotheses but to suggest new ones. I am only moving away from the 'fixed' or 'in-depth' aspect of an ethnography'[83].

Rationalising my methods

By the end of November, I was following and investigating different stories in parallel (the insufficiencies of agriculture and 'scarcity' in Vicente Salazar, *Socio Bosque* in Santa Rosa, communitarian tourism and the water conflict in Samona) which all seemed to have in common that they were the source of desire and aspiration but also tension, struggles and conflicts in the communities. I still felt like I was going against the grain whenever I tried to focus on oil decisions directly (as I did in Boca Tiputini and other communities), and I was open, at that stage, to the possibility that my focus was no longer oil extraction. I would understand the value of these exploratory months in terms of understanding oil decisions – indirectly – much later, during the writing phase. Indeed, oil decisions (and the inevitability of acceptance in particular) cannot be understood independently from the broader context in which they are embedded (which is one of scarcity, poverty and needs) and the ongoing process of change (which is

[82] Field notes 18/01/2017.
[83] Field notes 13/10/2016.

ecological, economic and cultural). I had been able to access that bigger picture by attending the *asambleas,* giving the people enough space to talk about subjects of matter to them, observing their reactions and their contradictions. My movements to different communities facing different situations and state projects – which had been frustrating at first, especially when there was no oil yet (Vicente Salazar and Santa Rosa) or when oil was no longer a topic of conversation (Samona) – had allowed me to access it too. State projects seemingly unrelated to oil extraction were telling of people's values, problems and aspirations and by investigating those different stories, I was getting to know the inhabitants, their lives, their desires and their constraints. I was starting to grasp, in particular, their conception of poverty and *salir adelante* [move forward], their relationship with nature, with money, their needs and aspirations, their problems, their expectations of the state, the objective state of their communities and how they perceived it, their conception of a good life, the processes of change already at play in the communities (which are visible through heterogeneities within and between the communities). I was already starting to understand oil decisions – as well as the struggles associated with oil and the consequences of oil extraction on peoples and territories – by getting to know the inhabitants – rather than asking direct questions about oil extraction. Thus, this indirect strategy, which had been – again – driven by a constraint (the apparent unwillingness of the inhabitants to talk about oil extraction and their openness when it came to many other topics) and apparently driving me away from my focus on oil, would finally be crucial in my understanding of oil decisions, oil struggles and the consequences of oil extraction and development.

At this stage of my fieldwork, however, I only knew (and was increasingly convinced) that concrete conversations embedded in people's daily lives were the right way to interact with the inhabitants. But I needed more pretexts to observe, discuss and exchange with them. During my time away in Quito, I had written already: 'ideally, I would find an activity which would

allow me interacting with them naturally while helping them in some way – English classes are fine but I can find much better'.

Juan would provide me with such opportunity at the end of October, while asking for my help to update the *Estudio Socio-Histórico* [ESH – Socio-Historical Study] of his community, Vicente Salazar, a necessary document for the community to be able to obtain legal status as a Quichua community, and which had been constantly rejected by the government – the last time in 2007. The opportunity would finally bring me back to oil is a very direct way – as the seismic study finally and inadvertently entered the territory of Vicente Salazar at the end of my stay.

3. Following the river: new research opportunities which brought me back to oil (October to January)

The mission involved three main exercises of data collection. First, I had to interview the elderly of the community, about the venue of the first inhabitants in the territory which is now called Vicente Salazar, the customs of the first inhabitants and how they have changed. I was then supposed to interview Rosalía, the President of Vicente Salazar, about the state of the community in terms of different categories, already established by the 2007 document: infrastructure, education, health, organisation, etc. Finally, it involved organising a *taller* [workshop] on 'culture' [what it means to be a Quichua person] which I would also use to conduct a survey with the inhabitants (on their origins, level of education, occupation, farming activities and earings). The community would normally have to hire a sociologist to do it, Juan told me, which was beyond its financial possibilities. I accepted, delighted.

New pretext for investigation: update of the ESH in Vicente Salazar

I had, by then, spent a fair amount of time with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar, partly due to the closeness to the village but also because they had been exceptionally welcoming and open, from the very beginning. I had attended all the *asambleas* and *mingas*, where Eloy would

always take me, from Tiputini, on his motorcycle. I had conducted an informal collective conversation with 21 *socios* after my second *asamblea* in the community. I was meeting regularly with the inhabitants, some of whom often came to Tiputini, had a second house in the village, or had a job in the village. I had become friends with Franco and Gaspar, brothers and grandchildren of Vicente Salazar (whose name was given to the community[84]), 'self-proclaimed' 100% Quichua in a community made of 40 per cent of *mestizos*, obsessed with the question of *rescate de la cultura* [rescuing of the culture] and eager to explain to me in lengthy details what it means to be a Quichua person and how this is changing in the communities; Rosalía, a Quichua woman, President of the community and Gaspar's wife; Johnny, a *mestizo*, driver of the school bus which sometimes took me to Santa Rosa, and his wife Jakelin, a Quichua woman native from Puerto Quinche; Eloy, Esteban and Misael, three *mestizos* living and working in Tiputini, and Noa, an elderly man who would walk from the community to attend the elderly meeting in Tiputini every Monday – and would often stop by Juan Manuel's house to rest and discuss with me. Although I did not consider Vicente Salazar to be a main site of 'investigation' – due to the proportion of *mestizos* in the community and the relative absence of state intervention, oil extraction more particularly – I felt included and welcome every time I went to the community.

After my interview with Rosalía about the state of the community, at the end of October (later enriched with Franco's comments on the previous 2007 document), she made a list of the oldest people of the community – Javierita, Renato, Noa, and Belizario – and we went to visit and interview them, accompanied by Franco and Gaspar, and Jakelin, all younger Quichua *socios* from the community. The enterprise took us two entire days and involved long walks in the

[84] The *socios* of the communities usually choose its name (by vote), and the name of Vicente Salazar was chosen in honour of a Quichua settler who is considered to be the first inhabitants of what is today the territory of Vicente Salazar. He was the father of Renato and grandfather of Franco, Gaspar, Carmina and Javier, who frequently intervene in the empirical story of the thesis.

community. Franco, Gaspar, Jakelin and Rosalía were here to guide me, introduce me to the elderly and occasionally translate my questions into Quichua and people's responses into Spanish. Indeed, the elderly of most communities in the *ribera* can understand but not speak Spanish, contrary to most adults who can understand Quichua but only speak Spanish, while most children do not even learn Quichua anymore. My 'guides' and translators would often respond in place of the elderly or translate a whole story into one or two sentences, and the sometimes difficult exercise of translation allowed me understanding a bit of the [sometimes huge] generational differences in both the diagnoses of the state of their communities, and aspirations. The whole thing ended up being a great and natural opportunity to interact with and get to know the inhabitants better, visit their houses, share food and jokes, conversations and ideas, and increasingly feel part of the community.

As part of the same historical record, I (met and) interviewed Javier, Gaspar's and Franco's older brother, grandchildren of Vicente Salazar, whom everyone pointed to as the most knowledgeable person of the community and who was supposed to know more than the very elderly about its history. I would meet and discuss with Javier very frequently during the rest of my stay. More educated than most people in the *ribera* and partly an 'outsider' in his own community (not a *socio*) Javier's views would greatly enrich my understanding of oil decisions, but also changing conceptions of culture, poverty and development in the communities. His comments punctuate the empirical story. I finally organised, at the beginning of November, a *taller* on 'culture' and 'poverty', which some 65 *socios* (out of 75) attended. I designed all the questions, exercises and activities to fit both the needs of the *estudio* and my own research. And I conducted a survey on the same day – which would be filled by everyone during the following week. Juan would play an active and valuable role, again, in the design of my methods and the framing of my questions – especially the *taller* and survey.

Figure 19: Lunch following the *minga* in the communal kitchen (Vicente Salazar)



Source: Eloy, a socio of Vicente Salazar

The whole process allowed me spending a lot of time with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar, but also learning even more about their history (including their story of migration and the story of the formation of the communities), problems, needs and aspirations, and about both 'culture' and 'poverty' and the many overlaps between the two in particular. Moreover, I saw those studies as an opportunity to contribute and give something during my stay – which was important to me in a context where I struggled to make sense of the idea of 'giving back' to the local people (in the form of data analysis) after one has 'extracted' information from them.

Figure 20: On our way to Noa's



Source: the author

Figure 21: Jakelin's firewood kitchen in her *finca*



Source: the author

Figure 22: Johnny, Adriano and Franco drinking *chicha* in Vicente Salazar



Source: the author

Three other communities

The same 'mission' would take me to Puerto Quiche [inside the ITT block] in November (following Juan's request again), and I would also conduct two historical investigations (a short history of the first inhabitants) in Bello Horizonte in December and Puerto Miranda in January, again for purposes of legalisation of status. Puerto Quiche and Puerto Miranda being both inside the ITT block (together with Boca Tiputini and three other Quichua communities), I finally evolved in settings where oil was a daily topic of conversation and where I could ask questions, have conversations and conduct interviews about it, with the opportunity to embed those questions in broader conversations about the studies I was conducting.

All in all, in the context of those '*estudios'*, between October and January, 1) I organised two *talleres* about people's perceptions of culture and 'poverty' (in Vicente Salazar and Puerto Quinche), 2) I conducted an individual survey (Vicente Salazar) and had access to an household one (Puerto Quinche – conducted by the provincial council), 3) I interviewed the President of the two communities (Rosalía in Vicente Salazar and Bernardo in Puerto Quinche) about the state of basic services, infrastructure and organisation in the community, 4) I interviewed the oldest people (19 of them) of the four communities (Vicente Salazar, Puerto Quinche, Bello Horizonte and Puerto Miranda), with the help of younger leaders (with translation from Quichua when necessary), which allowed me studying the historical narratives by old people from the community and their perception of change, and finally, 5) I spent time with the inhabitants and stayed at their house: I did repeated visits to Vicente Salazar, accessible by road from the village, stayed in Puerto Quinche and Puerto Miranda, accessible only by the river from Tiputini, for 3 days each (in the house of Belén in the former, and in the house of Eduardo, secretary of the community, in the latter), and in Bello Horizonte for 2 days (in the house of the President's mum).

Alongside the *estudios* between October and December, I was still following the boats, talking to people and asking as many questions as possible to the Quichua people, state actors, and oil workers, while always exploring new topics. I attended a meeting with indigenous leaders in Nuevo Rocafuerte (organised by the FAL), and some political events: on the turn to *'Movimiento creo'* from the Mayor, '*Movimiento del pueblo'* (people from Coca in Tiputini) and the football competition organised by the Provincial council (Pachakutik).

I also conducted more formal interviews with external actors, such as the three workers from the *Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería, Acuacultura y Pesca* [Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fishing – MAGAP] based in Tiputini who travelled to the communities on a daily basis. I met with Santa, a young Ecuadorian man (*mestizo*) working for the district of education, and with Soraya, a young Spanish woman who had been 'sent' to Tiputini to work with the *municipio* on agriculture and food sufficiency in the region, in the context of her work for the UNDP. Soraya, my neighbour in the 'hotel' of the *municipio* who soon also became my friend and running partner, knew the communities from a very different angle than mine and both her insights and our disagreements kept enriching my research during the second half of my fieldwork. I went back to Quito for a small break on December 22nd[85], and I returned to the River on January 12th, for a last month of fieldwork, after a couple of stops: first in Tena (where I met Nina Moeller who was then conducting her postdoctoral research on the new University of the Amazon as well as a communitarian project of *parteras* [midwives] that she introduced me to), then in Coca where I conducted more formal interviews – with a representative from state conservation programme *Socio Bosque*, actors of the tourism industry (one from the Provincial council, two private ones and one from Spanish NGO

[85] During my second stay in Quito I met, among other people, with Gerardo – a Quichua young man from Saraguro whom I had met in 2014 in Quito while he was preparing for an application to study for a bachelor in anthropology in Canada – which he eventually started the following year, thanks to a government's scholarship which had been developed under Correa, to help indigenous people study abroad. Gerardo had become my friend, as well as a source of the most invaluable kind of knowledge on the aspirations and struggles of indigenous people in Ecuador and more generally in the modern world.

Solidaridad Internacional), Achacaspi (the capuchin priest from Nuevo Rocafuerte), Amelia and Daniel (a lawyer and sociologist, respectively, from the FAL) –, and finally in Pañacocha, the first City of the Millennium in the *ribera*, where the *turno* stops daily for a lunch break halfway through the Napo River (from Coca to Tiputini and the other way round), and where, this time, I stayed for three days to visit Eladio, my friend from Sani Isla (another neighbouring Quichua community, famous for its communitarian tourism project) who happened to be married with the President's daughter. Chapter 8 owes a lot to this short and improvised visit to Pañacocha which subsequently gave me countless opportunities to discuss with the inhabitants the idea of living in a village, and in a city.

A new seismic study in Vicente Salazar (January)

In January, I attended the monthly *minga* in Vicente Salazar, like every month. This time, however, I had come to say my goodbyes to the inhabitants. It is during the *minga* that the new seismic study in blocks 31 and 43 (ITT), overlapping the territory of Vicente Salazar, was finally announced by PAM. The company would come, together with the Ministry of the Environment, to *socializar*[86] the project the following month in the community. I knew that oil was going to enter the territory of Vicente Salazar, but had given up on the possibility that it might happen during my stay. As a result of the announcement, I decided to extend my fieldwork by a couple of weeks in order to attend the events and, in the meantime, to finally talk about oil decisions in a very concrete (and embedded) way with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar, a community which now felt like home. On January 23rd, I wrote: 'new opportunity. New prior consultation. All these artificial interviews which I refused to do, I no longer have to do them. I will talk with friends, people I know quite well, about how they perceive the new

[86] There is no good English translation for the Spanish word *socializar*. It means to inform and explain at the same time and is often used by the communities and local governments to talk about state 'projects' being offered to indigenous people or carried in indigenous territories. I sometimes translate it as 'socialize'.

project. No need for questions of the kind: would you like to live in a city? Do you think culture is important? The interviews can be more relaxed. In fact, they will be conversations.'[87].

The new seismic study [in blocks 31 and 43 (ITT)] was also coming to Santa Rosa, the second community where I had been spending most time, and to Llanchama, a community situated along the Tiputini river (a 3-hour boat journey from Tiputini), and inside oil block 31, where I had been in 2014 but had not had an opportunity to return, yet, this time. It involved, in each of the three communities, a *taller*, organised with the inhabitants in the *casa communal* [community centre] situated in the centre of the community – during which the company would introduce the EIA and the PMA, while the inhabitants would ask all kinds of questions – and a *mesa de información* – which would consist in a man sitting in the same *casa communal* during three consecutive days for the inhabitants to individually come, ask questions and clarifications, and write down their observations on a document provided by the company.

While waiting for the event, I spent most of January doing different activities with my friends from Vicente Salazar while discussing the entrance of PAM in the community: I spent a day with Jakelin, cooking and farming on her *finca*. I visited Franco in his house. I went to the *mingas*, *asambleas* and *fiestas*. I travelled by bus with Johnny. I shared *batidos* [smoothies] with Gaspar and Rosalía in Tiputini. I visited the Yasuní Park with Salvador, Noa's son who had come back from Spain to visit his dad. I also conducted six formal (and recorded) interviews (sometimes individual, sometimes collective) with the *socios* I could find in Tiputini and in the community. These last interviews and conversations, this time conducted with people I felt comfortable with and with whom trust had been built, were embedded in concrete events of their lives. They felt natural and worked well. They were focused on oil decisions, but I also used them as a way to 'formalise' some of the topics I had been exploring and investigating

[87] Field notes 23/01/2017.

during my stay – about, notably, people's perceptions of agriculture, their relationship with the *finca* and the forest, with money and basic services, health and education, their perceptions of the impacts from oil, of the benefits from the social compensation, what it means to work for the company, gather in a village (a theme which had become particularly interesting in a context where the *municipio* planned to gather the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar as a *pueblo* as a condition to provide electricity to the community) and move to the city, their aspirations and conceptions of the good life – while confirming some of my 'findings'. I widely draw on them in the empirical story of the thesis.

At the beginning of February, I attended the *taller* and observed the *mesa* in Vicente Salazar. I used the opportunity to discuss with the workers from the consultancy in charge of organising the two events, and to gather documents from the oil company and consultancy – I got access, in particular, to the observation of the inhabitants of three communities (Vicente Salazar, Santa Rosa and Llanchama) during the *mesas de información*. I also invited Carlos Larrea to the *consulta*, which proved an interesting cultural exchange – both with the Quichua inhabitants and with the oil workers. I finally travelled to Llanchama where I also attended the *taller* and observed the interaction between the inhabitants and the worker from the consultancy at the *mesa de información*. I used the opportunity to talk to the family I had met in 2014, get feedback from Homero, the young son, on what I had written about his community in my MPhil thesis[88], talked to many other people I had not met in 2014 and interviewed Alexia, a Quichua woman and the new President of the community. Most of the data gathered during this last month, more directly focused on oil than the previous months of my fieldwork all added, helped me shape my second empirical chapter (chapter 5), on oil decisions.

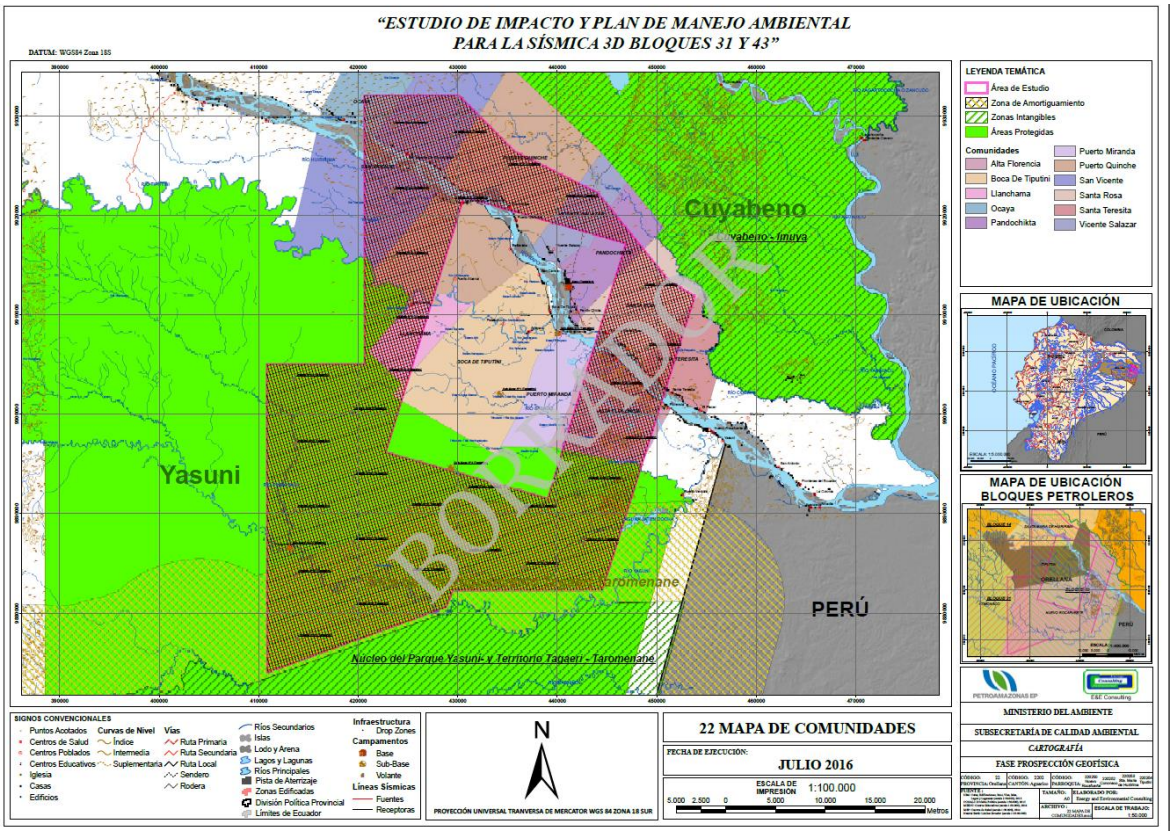
[88] He corrected me on a date I had got wrong.

Figure 23: Poster advertising the *socialización*[89] of the new seismic study, January 2017



Source: the author

Figure 24: 'Mapa de comunidades'



Source: EIA January 2017

[89] See *socializar* in glossary.

After the events in February, I went back to Quito where I conducted more interviews with different academics (a lot more focused on multi criteria analysis), NGOs and state officials – until I left Ecuador at the end of March. During my last stay in Quito, I also met and interviewed Joan Martinez-Alier, who had travelled to Quito to receive two *homenajes* [tributes] from the Universities Andina and FLACSO after he had received the 2017 Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought, due to his particular contribution to Ecuadorian debates and issues, both as a researcher and an activist (notably due to his links with *Acción Ecológica*).

4. Resulting data, data analysis and resulting story

Prior to fieldwork, my idea was to conduct an in-depth analysis of oil decisions in a small setting (one community), made of a combination of methods. I had prepared an in-depth kind of interview to be conducted with all the inhabitants of the community. I had planned to attend some events in the community and to observe the inhabitants' relationships with the oil workers, with nature, with money. I had also planned to conduct household surveys, to be able to get a sense of the objective situation (socio-economic) of the people I was interviewing, and finally, do some focus groups on perceptions of culture and development by the inhabitants. The goal was to investigate why the inhabitants accept the entrance of the oil company in their territory and what such a decision implies for them. In summary, I wanted to conduct an in-depth (and structured) analysis (made of a mix of different approaches) directly focused on one specific topic (oil decisions) in a small defined setting (one community). Driven by the logistical constraints of my field site, the specificities of the Quichua people and of the situation (with the arrival of oil extraction and the new presence of the oil company), but also reflexivity on both the information I was looking for and the kind of information my methods were allowing, I had constantly reframed my methodology – which had resulted in three main changes during fieldwork (methods, place and focus) and which had expanded my focus, from oil decisions to

various development alternatives and state projects in the *ribera* and their perceptions by the inhabitants, the valuation struggles they create, and their consequences.

In this last section, I explain how the writing process brought me back to oil in a powerful way to create a dynamic, indirect and concrete (rather than fixed, direct and abstract) investigation of oil decisions, oil (valuation) struggles and oil development. I start by providing some further reflection on my methods for data generation and describe my data analysis and writing process.

Resulting data [and some further reflection on my methods for data generation]

The five months I spent in the Amazon resulted in several notebooks filled with notes about some 400 'exchanges' – including conversations (both individual and collective), interviews (about thirty of which are recorded and formal), workshops and events organised or attended, and my own observations and reflections – in addition to 63 'exchanges' (mostly interviews and conversations) in Quito. The interviews and conversations were carried with all the different actors mentioned in this chapter (Quichua and *mestizo* inhabitants of Tiputini and the surrounding Quichua communities, state and local state actors in Quito, Coca and Tiputini, NGOs and indigenous organisations, actors from the corporate world, oil workers and consultants, academics, and indigenous people living outside the *ribera*).

I also gathered official documents (from the communities, the *municipio*, the oil company, the provincial council and the central government), maps and pictures, and surveys, and conducted a survey myself. Although I clearly had to face what Weiner (1964) calls an 'underdeveloped state' of data collection in the communities, it was partly compensated by the analysis of documents recently created by PAM – as part of the recently conducted EIA – most of which I could access through the oil workers, and by the interviews and conversations with different actors having different perspectives. These different sources allowed me to triangulate my findings, and notably overcome the government's exaggeration and rhetoric that Tansey (2007)

warns about when it comes to conduct elite interviews – including their optimism regarding environmental impacts (Bass et al., 2010; Bebbington, 2011) – as well as the obvious biases of environmental activists. But divergences and potential biases, opinions and rhetoric are as important as objective facts in my research strategy. As White (2000) argues, they can become the object of one's research when the goal is to understand perceived truths.

I followed, in each community, what Kohlbacher calls a 'case study' approach. Case studies are particularly relevant, according to him, "when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (2006). Because they consist in focusing on the dynamics present within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989) – in my case, various single settings – case studies were particularly suited in a context where my goal was to raise hypotheses (which could in turn illuminate the theoretical framework I had in mind), rather than testing previously stated hypotheses (Kohlbacher, 2006). Case studies are not a method but a 'research strategy', following Kohlbacher (2006). In my case, they were based on conversations, observation and participation. I also gathered background information from the communities through active observation of their daily activities, which Kusenbach (2003) defines as 'go alongs'. I gathered data in each community until reaching a point of "saturation" (Small, 2009) of new information (whenever possible and in particular when I was not constrained in my movements to a specific community and setting before that happened).

Moreover, I had different roles in different contexts and communities: the silent foreigner following Juan to the *asambleas* (which helped me understand the context and situation of the communities in order to prepare the next steps, without having to present myself or interact with the people), the English teacher in Samona (which gave me easier access to the oil workers, for instance), the anthropologist helping out with the ESH (which gave me incredible access to topics I would never have been able to touch otherwise), the French girl (a tourist?) hanging

out in the village with no apparent reason (discussing, playing dominos and occasionally selling milkshakes) and, finally the student studying oil extraction and conducting interviews. Scheper-Hughes defines this as "an anthropology-with-one's-feet-on-the-ground" (1993: 4)[90]. Most of the interviews and conversations were conducted in Spanish, which is the daily language of the inhabitants of the *ribera*, whether Quichua or *mestizos*. The few exceptions are some of my interviews with the elderly – which were translated by younger *socios* from the same communities. I sometimes took notes of my conversations with the people directly during the conversation, on my notebook – and I would then type on my computer in the evening. Most of the time, however, it felt more natural to talk without writing, and I would run to my notebook – or computer when possible – to take notes following the conversation[91]. As a result of this, except for some 30 recorded interviews, the quotes and data included in the thesis are approximate rendering of what the people had told me – which I subsequently translated. Eliza, a friend from Mexico, transcribed most of the recorded interviews and I translated them into English. Unless they explicitly asked me otherwise, the names of my informants are pseudonymised (including this chapter) in order to protect their identity.

Connecting the dots: data analysis and resulting story: an embedded (dynamic, indirect and concrete) investigation of oil decisions, oil (valuation) struggles and oil development

As I came back from fieldwork I was convinced that the focus of my thesis had become much broader than oil: I was writing about the struggles of the Quichua people in the face of alternatives for development which, whether agricultural projects, conservation programme *Socio Bosque*, communitarian tourism projects, basic services provision and oil extraction, all put them in front of an impossible dilemma between 'difference' and 'equality'. Oil was one component, and one chapter, in this broader story. I analysed the data by writing stories (as

[90] See also Marcus (1995) on changing identities with sites/people and taking on different 'roles' in the field.
[91] See Malinowski (1922) on 'really taking part' instead of taking notes and Jackson (1987) on knowledge as experience.

chapters) community by community: I wrote about 1) Samona (oil extraction, communitarian tourism and drinking water), then about 2) Santa Rosa (*Socio Bosque*, communitarian tourism and oil extraction), and finally about 3) Vicente Salazar (agricultural projects, poverty and culture, and the new seismic study). I then reorganised the stories thematically (around agriculture and poverty, *Socio Bosque*, oil extraction, drinking water and 'change' – which included wage labour and the transformation of the communities into villages). I decided, at that stage, to drop communitarian tourism – which mainly touched upon the same themes and issues as conservation programme *Socio Bosque*. I later dropped the *Socio Bosque* chapter too.

I played with the interviews and wrote and rewrote my stories until I could see a chronological story emerge, as I slowly realised that my movements to different communities had allowed me to observe, witness and experience not only different situations and contexts but different stages of the oil extraction process – and the broader process of change at play in the *ribera*. As oil had entered the communities of Santa Rosa and Vicente Salazar at the end of my fieldwork, they had become pictures of the situation of the communities and aspirations of their inhabitants before the entrance of oil extraction. At the same time, the water conflict in Samona, situated further up the river and where oil extraction (in block 31) had started much earlier than the ITT project [in 2000], thus ahead in the oil development process, increasingly appeared to provide a picture of a community after oil has entered and the social compensation has been provided[92] – in this case in the form of a drinking water plant which had eventually come with a monthly payment (the source of the conflict) and would probably come, in the lower part of the river, with jobs as well as prospects of transforming the communities into villages (gathering in the centre to lower the costs of basic service provision) and later moving to the city – topics which I had studied independently from each other.

[92] As I show in the empirical chapters and as Achacaspi, the capuchin priest of the *ribera*, told me then, the communities obtain the basic services not from the state but from the oil company.

I slowly realised that this dynamic investigation is key to understand both the inevitability of oil (acceptance) and its consequences on peoples and territories, in the particular context (time and place) of the Lower Napo River. The development which comes with oil in Samona, for instance, in addition to an object of inquiry in itself, is illuminating of both the reasons why the communities accept oil extraction in their territories and how their peoples and territories are likely to be affected by oil extraction and the developments it comes with – since the biggest consequences on peoples and their territories come, as I argue in the empirical chapters of the thesis, from the benefits rather than from the direct environmental impacts from oil. In the same way, the 'insufficiencies' of agriculture and other state and NGO projects, the lack of economic alternatives in the region and a certain (changing) conception of poverty (which I had been investigating in Santa Rosa and Vicente Salazar) go a long way in understanding acceptance.

The writing process thus allowed me rationalising an idea which was at its intuitive state during most of my fieldwork: that oil decisions among the Quichua inhabitants of the Lower Napo River could not be understood independently from the much broader process of ecological, cultural and socio-economic change at play in the *ribera* in which those decisions are embedded – nor could they be made sense of by looking at oil decisions at a given point in time. The exploration of the broader cultural, economic and ecological context of the communities, through 'development alternatives' (and their systematic failure) and (conflictive) encounters with the state up and down the river, in communities at different stages of the oil extraction process (before, during and after), enriches and illuminates my understanding of oil responses, oil struggles and oil development to an extent I could never have reached through the direct and fixed investigation of oil decisions I had planned to conduct. And the patterns arising from the study of different communities, similar in terms of values, economy and community organisation, but at different stages of state intervention and oil extraction, allows me drawing a dynamic, almost chronological account of oil decisions, oil

development and oil struggles in the *ribera*: Vicente Salazar, Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta before oil, Puerto Quinche, Puerto Miranda and Boca Tiputini inside the ITT oil block and Samona after oil (and Llanchama both before and after oil since it is both inside block 31, an older block which started in 2000, and part of the new seismic study). By travelling up and down the Napo River, I had been travelling not only in space, but in time.

Concretely, I rewrote the empirical story in a thematic and chronological order: 1) people's relationship with nature and money and a changing conception of poverty (before oil), 2) the entrance of the oil company, the inevitability of acceptance and how negotiations revolve around the 'social compensation', 3) drinking water and the water conflict (in Samona, after the entrance of the oil company), 4) wage labour in the mixed economy (after the entrance of the oil company and, in the ITT block, before basic services are provided as part of the social compensation) and, finally, 5) prospects of going to the city, after oil, and the transformation of the communities in small villages (i.e. the urbanisation of the *ribera*).

The result is an investigation of oil decisions and oil development in the communities, as I had planned from the beginning, but with the crucial difference that it is dynamic (embedded in time and space) instead of fixed (in one place), indirect (embedded in the broader process of change already at play in the communities of the *ribera*, which is economic, ecological and cultural) rather than directly focused on oil decisions, and concrete (embedded in people's daily lives) rather than investigated through abstract interviews. This third point is particularly important since the inhabitants could not have told me about the structural forces which make the acceptance of oil inevitable in the communities, not could they have predicted the most indirect and long-term impacts from oil – as it became clear in the writing phase. As Malinowski argued long ago indeed, 'there is a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality.' (1922: 18) Thus 'it would be futile to attempt questioning a native in

abstract, sociological terms'. Instead, the 'expedient for an Ethnographer consists in collecting concrete data of evidence, and drawing the general inferences for himself' (1922: 11-12).

Writing struggles

The writing process, in an interesting way, brought back the same struggles I had experienced in the field: from intuitive (and very descriptive) writing-style (where I almost let the people of the *ribera* write the story for me – and often got lost in the process) to a more economistic (and 'objective') writing approach (where my analytical voice hides people's narratives, which are only here to illustrate and support my argument)[93] before I finally found a satisfactory middle ground – and realised this was called ethnographic writing. The challenge, as Geertz describes it, is 'to sound like a pilgrim and a cartographer at the same time' (1988: 10) – in his own words a tension between 'impressionism' and 'objectivity' (Geertz, 1988) which is also a tension between the need to grasp and the need to analyse (Geertz, 2008). In Willis' style[94], every empirical chapter is made of an ethnographic story (structured around my conversations with the inhabitants of the *ribera*, and told with their words and language) followed by a discussion (where my own analytical voice comes more explicitly in). Moreover, the empirical chapters deliberately follow an exclusively empirical focus so as to give the reader a raw, bottom up and inductive account of these conversations. The empirical insights from the chapters are brought back in conversation with my theoretical framework in the conclusions.

[93] See Geertz on 'the pretense of looking at the world directly (…) seeing others as they really are' (1988: 141) and in Scheper-Hughes' words, the 'pretense' there is 'no ethnographer in the field' (1993: 23).
[94] In his book "Learning to Labour" (1977), Willis separates the 'ethnography' and the 'analysis' (where he uses the ethnography to make analytical inferences) (see Marcus, 1986).

Chapter 4. 'The *indígena* too has the right to progress': scarcity and (changing) needs, (leading to) poverty and dependence (first empirical chapter)

Introduction: (changing) relationship with nature

During our first interview, outside of his house in Tiputini, Juan tells me: 'the people depend on nature for all their life. Eating, drinking, everything.'[95] During the *taller* in Puerto Quinche, to my question 'what is the most important to live well?', a man responds: 'to preserve the environment and nature', and an old woman adds: 'the yucca, plantain, the maize, the rice, tomato, the native potato'. I ask for more answers. A man takes the floor and says: 'there is no more. *Es que todo lo tenemos en la naturaleza* [it's just that we get everything from nature]. The western culture is not the indigenous culture. There, you need to buy. Here no.' I then ask what the shops are for. They respond: 'It's for the accompaniment. The salt, the tomato, the onion. The salt is the most important'.[96]

After he said: 'here we live *chévere*!'. (…), we eat what we cultivate. We live well', Homero, a *socio* of Yanayacu, tells me: 'Here we need to buy. The shoes, the clothes, the food, the education. Everything has to be bought here.'[97]. Javierita explains, 'without money, we can't buy clothes and food. And for the disease sometimes, the medicine.'[98] And Joaquín, President of Santa Rosa, concludes: 'without money you cannot do anything'[99].

In this chapter, I analyse the (changing) relationship of the inhabitants of the *ribera* with their environment (river, land, forest and animals). I show how an increasingly constrained and limited use of nature as a source of livelihood, due to external pressures (leading to scarcity in nature) as well as the growing insufficiencies of nature to provide for people's new needs (which are due to the changing values and considerations of the inhabitants), results in

[95] Interview 28/08/2016.
[96] *Taller* 10/11/2016.
[97] Conversation 17/12/2016.
[98] Interview 31/10/2016.
[99] interview 9/12/2016.

increased dependence on money and the state to provide for people's livelihoods. I suggest, in turn, that the scarcity of money and state provision in the communities leaves the inhabitants in a limbo, in a context where subsistence livelihoods are increasingly reframed as lack of progress and poverty by the inhabitants themselves.

The chapter revolves around five domains of people's needs – which I identified during my stay: water provision (section 1), food provision (section 2), money provision (section 3), 'bigger things' (section 4) and materials for the house (section 5).

Most of the data in this chapter comes from Vicente Salazar, a 'Quichua' community of 75 *socios*, among whom 40 per cent are *mestizos* – an exception in the *ribera*. In August 2016, when I started my fieldwork, the community was outside the ITT block, which overlaps the territory of six neighbouring communities: Boca Tiputini, Puerto Quinche, Puerto Miranda, Chiro Isla, Sinchi Chicta and San Vicente. The oil company would eventually enter the community of Vicente Salazar at the very end of my fieldwork, in February 2017, to 'socialize' a new seismic study in blocks 43 (ITT) and 31, which would this time overlap the territory of Vicente Salazar. The information in this chapter was gathered before the inhabitants had even heard about the arrival of PAM in the community. As such, one of the roles of the chapter is to draw a picture of the 'mixed values' and 'multiple worldviews' (multiple conceptions of poverty in particular) of the inhabitants before the entrance of the oil company, as well as the 'mixed economy' (subsistence and cash) which is marked by scarcity (at multiple levels: nature, money, and state provision), unfulfilled needs and a demand for change.

The data gathered in Vicente Salazar is complemented by data from three of the six communities inside the ITT block (Boca Tiputini, Puerto Miranda and Puerto Quinche), where oil extraction had just started (in March 2016), as well as Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta, also outside of the ITT block, next to it and soon to be included in the seismic activities.

1. Water scarcity: from the Napo River to 'drinking water'

The inhabitants of the communities, which territories are all situated along the Napo River, use the water from the river for all their needs: drinking, cleaning aliments, clothes and dishes, preparing *chicha*, and bathing. The river, however, is polluted. While the extent of such pollution is not known with accuracy – because of the absence of 'technical studies'[100], according to Francis, a *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar who works as a technician in the health centre[101] – it is common knowledge among the inhabitants of the communities. As Bernardo, *socio* and President of Puerto Quinche, tells me during an interview about the state of his community (as part of the update of the ESH): 'People normally use the water from the Napo River. But it is super polluted'.[102]

According to the *plan de manejo* of Vicente Salazar[103], the river is polluted because of different contaminants which are frequently discharged in its upper part, such as *aguas negras* [black water], and pollution related to oil extraction, agriculture, and livestock. It is most often assigned by the inhabitants to past oil exploration (in the ITT block) and oil extraction projects (further up the river, in block 31 notably). Noa, an elderly *mestizo* man, *socio* of Vicente Salazar, recalls an oil spill: 'An oil pipe broke. Of that size/that wide! (…) The river was all black (…) It was in the time of Chevron. Texaco. They were owners of the part of here.'[104] Francis explains to me: 'an earthquake broke the oil pipes (upper in the river, close to Coca), and the pollution arrived through the Napo River – which goes until Peru, and which the Coca River falls into. This was in 1987, when American oil firm Texaco was operating in the area.' He

[100] Conversation 28/08/2016.
[101] I had met Francis in 2014, when he tested me for malaria (which I thought I had contracted). The inhabitants called him 'doctor' and I always thought he was one until I returned to the *ribera* in 2016 and learnt from Araceli, the cook of the Colombian *comedor* in Tiputini, that Francis is not a 'doctor' for having studied medicine for a year in University, in the same way as Juan is not a 'lawyer' for having studied one year of Law.
[102] Interview 16/11/2016.
[103] 2016.
[104] Interview 2/11/2016.

recalls, as Noa, that 'the water was black!'[105] The same *plan de manejo* states that the consumption of the water from the river is a constant threat for the health of the inhabitants. When I ask Francis, he clarifies: even though people do not get sick straight away – as it would happen to me, he argues, if I drank the water from the river[106] – as they are used to the bacteria, they could indeed get cancer in the long term[107]. I would hear, later during my stay, about skin conditions in the community of Samona and *hongos* [fungus] in Puerto Quinche[108] – but would be denied access to official documents and statistics from the hospital in Nuevo Rocafuerte, despite the official request I made[109].

The communities occasionally rely on alternative sources of water, such as the rain and estuaries. While the water from the river is contaminated, the water from the Purnayacu *quebrada* [ravine] in Vicente Salazar is *casi no* ['almost not']. This observation from Rosalía [110], *socia* and President of Vicente Salazar, was shared by other inhabitants but again could not be contrasted with official information, inexistent in the region. Edgar's parents, *socios* of Santa Rosa, take their water from the *quebrada*. 'It's good, they tell me, but some people do not have a *quebrada* and they have to drink from the river'[111]. Indeed, not every family has access to an estuary near their houses. The water from the rain, on the other hand, requires zinc roofs to be collected and tanks to be stored – which both cost money. According to Bernardo, the President of Puerto Quinche, few people are able to collect the water from the rain in his community as a result[112]. And, as Edgar, a *socio* of Santa Rosa, comments, 'when it does not

[105] Conversation 30/08/2016.
[106] A prediction of Francis which, luckily for me, proved false despite repeated consumption of the *chicha* which is prepared with the water from the river.
[107] Conversation 30/08/2016.
[108] Conversations with Belén 10-12/11/2016.
[109] A 2016 study by Clínica Ambiental (conducted in oil sites in Sucumbíos, one of the six Amazonian Provinces) shows that water pollution is often responsible for digestive issues (2017).
[110] Interview 31/10/2016.
[111] Conversation 9/12/2016.
[112] 16/11/2016.

rain, there is no water.'[113] In 2009, the Municipality provided the community of Vicente Salazar with *agua entubada* [piped water][114]. 'Now the issue of water has almost been solved, Francis tells me, because the communities were given sources of water from the subsoil. This water is not polluted.'[115] This is not the case in most communities, however. Provision from the *municipio* is very heterogeneous and depends on a number of factors such as closeness to the village, size and spatial organisation of the territories, the requests of the inhabitants (every Monday, the Presidents of the communities have the opportunity to meet the Mayor in his offices in the Municipality in Tiputini with a list of requests from their community which have been discussed among the *socios* during the *asamblea)* and political support for the Mayor, as I heard countless times during my stay.

According to the social diagnostic of Grupo Renss [see figure 25 below], the subcontractor of PAM in charge of conducting the EIA for the extension of the ITT block into 4 new platforms in Boca Tiputini in March 2016 and one of the only official sources of information on water provision in the communities, only 4 of the 13 communities [including Tiputini, the village] of the canton Aguarico had access to *agua entubada* as their main source of water, while 8 of them mostly used the water from the *río* [river] – including Vicente Salazar – and one of them – Llanchama – used water from a *pozo* [well] reaching every house. During my interview with Rosalía, the President of Vicente Salazar, she confirms that 'the inhabitants use *agua entubada*, in addition to the water from the Napo River, from the rain, and from the Purnayacu *quebrada*, to drink and to wash bodies and clothes.'[116] The well, situated in the *centro poblado* of Vicente Salazar, is easily accessible only for the inhabitants who live close to the centre – as it happens in almost every community with *agua entubada*.

[113] Conversation 28/01/2017.
[114] Interview Franco 16/11/2016.
[115] Conversation 30/08/2016.
[116] Interview 31/10/2016.

Figure 25: State of water provision in the communities of Aguarico



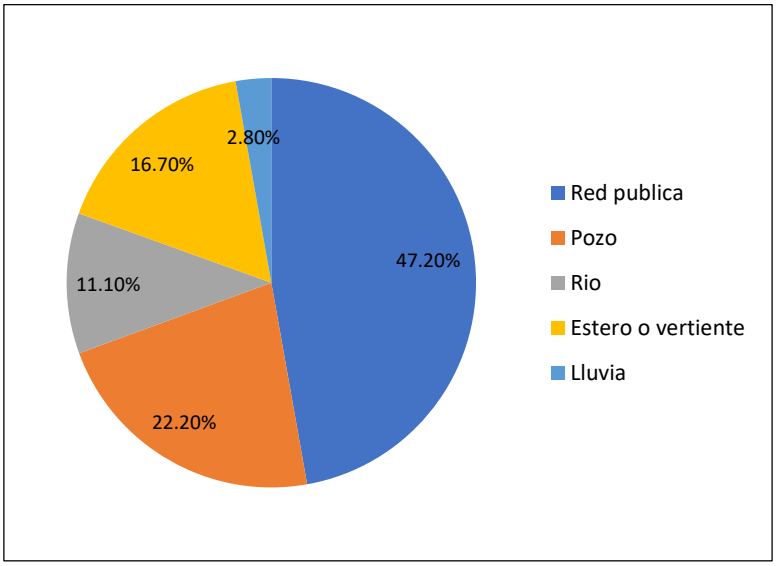
Source: EIA (2016), Grupo Renss

According to the *plan de manejo*[117], as a result, 47.2% of the inhabitants use *agua entubada*, while 22.2% use water from a well, 16.7% use water from an estuary, 11.1% use the water from the river and 2.8% use the water from the rain [figure 26 below]. Moreover, the inhabitants collectively still use the water from the river to prepare the *chicha* for their monthly gatherings (*mingas* and *asambleas*) – as I witnessed (and experienced) in the various *asambleas*

[117] 2016, p7-8.

I attended. Francis reiterates, and insists: 'this is problematic (…) and in the long term, it can be harmful for them.'[118]

Figure 26: Proportion of the different sources of water in Vicente Salazar



Source: Plan de manejo (2016 p7)

Finally, this water is not 'drinkable' – 'because of the minerals it contains', Francis explains. He adds: 'the concept of "drinkable" is a norm from your countries, but in the process of *potabilización* [stabilisation], you also lose many good things, such as the minerals.' The people are 'more resistant as a result', in his view[119]. The inhabitants, however, keep insisting that the drinking water is lacking. Lopez, a *mestizo* and another *socio*, comments: 'there is water but it's not drinkable. (…) It's not drinkable, this water that an engine or a bomb puts in the well and you pull'. 'It is *entubada*?' – I ask. 'Yes, and it's not drinkable.'[120], he repeats. And while Rosalía, the President, insists that I write in my report [update of the ESH] that 'there is no drinking water in the community'[121], Franco, another *socio*, emphasises that 'the

[118] 30/08/2016.
[119] Conversation 30/08/2016.
[120] Interview 1/02/2017.
[121] Interview 31/10/2016.

"vital liquid" is still missing in Vicente Salazar'[122]. As shown by figure 27 from Grupo Renss below, on basic services provision in the canton Aguarico (water, electricity, garbage recollection and sewage system), none of the communities had access to *agua potable* [drinking water] in March 2016. Samona, further up the river, part of another canton and oil block (31) and where I travel in chapter 6, was then the only community of the *ribera* with a drinking water plant.

Figure 27: Basic service provision in the communities of Aguarico



Source: EIA (2016), Grupo Renss

As a competency of the *municipio*, the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar expect it to provide them with drinking water. In that vein, Franco remembers that 'the outgoing government said: "*hasta*

[122] Interview 16/11/2016.

el 2014 todo la Amazonía va a tener luz y agua" [in 2014 the whole Amazon will have electricity and water]' and 'the one who has to provide [the 'basic services'] is the competent authority'. 'But, he notes, up to now, nothing. See Vicente Salazar, which is the closest community [from Tiputini, the village]!'[123]

2. Food provision: from hunting and fishing to the *finca* and the shops

Prohibitions and controls from the MAE

Hunting and fishing, two traditional subsistence activities of the Quichua people, are on the decline in the *ribera*. Discussions around the hunting and fishing situation in the communities mostly revolve around the prohibitions and controls recently put in place by the *Ministerio del Ambiente* [MAE – Ministry of the Environment], which limits hunting and fishing for conservation purposes and about which the inhabitants, the elderly in particular, regularly complain. They often contrast their freedom in the past with the new controls from the state[124] with a sense that 'it was better before'[125], and they question the MAE's legitimacy to 'forbid everything'[126]. Adriana, an elderly Quichua woman of Santa Rosa, tells me: 'We do not want them to control us. We are the owners of the forest. We maintain it. We know how much we should hunt. One animal a day we kill.'[127] And Abraham, an elderly man, *socio* of Puerto Miranda, does not agree to 'being controlled' in his own territory. 'How come they can forbid us? He claims. We are natives from here, they don't have the right!'[128] They invoke the cultural dimension of hunting and fishing which was part of their ancestors' ways of living. Edgar's parents, *socios* of Santa Rosa, tell me: 'We don't like to eat chicken. We like to change every day, *guangana*[129] etc. Our parents, our grandparents, used to live like this. But today they

[123] Interview Franco and Carmina 26/01/2017.
[124] Interview Josefina 18/01/2017.
[125] Interviews León 11/11/2016, Fidel 5/12/2016 and Sebastián 18/01/2017.
[126] Abraham 18/01/2017.
[127] Collective conversation 11/09/2016.
[128] Interview 18/01/2017.
[129] *Carne de monte* [bush meat] – see figure 28 below.

prohibit us everything[130]. León, a *socio* of Puerto Quinche, concurs: They used to hunt more. They used to fish more too. Because it was free. It's no longer free: it's forbidden. But we don't want that. It's our culture and we don't want to forget it.' He concludes: 'They want us to change, but we don't want to.'[131]

They sometimes do not understand the reasons for the controls[132] and when they do, they often disagree with the idea that the animals do not reproduce fast enough. In that vein, Rogelio, *socio* and President of San Vicente, is not the only person considering that 'they don't understand that the animals reproduce. So, we can keep a quantity for the reproduction and another for sale. It's like saying that the chicken will run out!'[133]. Adriana also thinks that '*la carne de monte* [bush meat] is not disappearing. This is a lie! Every day, the animals reproduce a lot'. As for Fidel, a *socio* of Bello Horizonte, he complains that the Huaorani are the ones who hunt, 'and no one is controlling them.'[134]

I realise, while discussing with some local state officials (from the MAE and *Socio Bosque* programme in particular[135]), that while selling the meat and fish was recently forbidden, hunting and fishing are allowed for family consumption. The issue, in fact, is twofold. One is that some inhabitants used to sell the meat and fish in Tiputini and have seen their cash resources decrease since the prohibitions were put in place – as Adriana explains to me. She insists: 'we do not have enough anymore! We all have children! (…) The problem is with what we sell, it is not enough to buy everything we need: the salt, the oil and the soap. And the sugar as well, for breakfast.' She goes on: 'The government is not giving us food either!'[136] And Rogelio exclaims: 'they [from the government] live well. If they lived like us, they wouldn't

[130] Conversation 9/12/2016.
[131] Interview 11/11/2016.
[132] Interview Sebastián 18/01/2017.
[133] Conversation 17/10/2016.
[134] Interview 5/12/2016.
[135] Interview MAE 10/01/2017.
[136] Conversation 7/12/2016.

forbid the sale.'[137] The inhabitants, however, continue hunting and fishing, and selling the meat and fish, *a escondidas* [hidden][138].

Figure 28: A *guangana* hunt by a *socio* of Puerto Miranda



Source: the author

Scarcity of the meat and fishes

I increasingly understand that the real issue is the growing scarcity of the meat and fishes. Edgar's parents, after complaining about the prohibitions, go on: 'The problem here is that there is almost no fish and no *carne de monte* anymore. The meat runs away.'[139] Indeed, there is less and less fish in the polluted Napo River. According to Francis, 'there used to be lots of fishes in the river' but since this spill in 1987 'no one fishes in this river. The people fish in the lagoons.'[140]. Noa similarly recalls that 'there were almost no fishes' after the spill and that

[137] Conversation 17/10/2016.
[138] Conversations Adriana 11/09/2016, Rogelio 17/10/2016 and interview Ilda 6/12/2016.
[139] Conversation 9/12/2016.
[140] Conversation 30/08/2016.

'they've been scarce since [then]'[141]. I heard repeatedly, during my stay, that the animals were 'fleeing and going away'[142], 'running out'[143] and 'moving further and further inside'[144]. According to Noa: 'There were lots of *guanganas* before. There are not much anymore.'[145] The reason for the decreasing number of animals seems to be both past oil exploration in the ITT – in particular the noise of the seismic detonations[146] and, according to Noa (who lives right next to the Shell airstrip[147] and used to work as a *capataz* for Western), the noise of the helicopters from the oil companies which came to explore the area and 'used to be larger than today's small planes.'[148] Noa also considers, as many other people, that it is due to the number of people in the area – an increase which, while it is constantly highlighted by the elderly I interview, is rarely seen as related with the new and growing scarcity of animals.

In that vein, and contrary to their elders, some young people consider that the inhabitants are now overhunting a resource which needs a long time to reproduce and fear there will not be enough food for future generations. This is the case of Danilo and Beatriz. Contrary to Adriana, the relatively young couple from Santa Rosa has a view of conservation as necessary for future generations to have the food they need to survive. Accordingly, they see the prohibitions as 'a way to take care [*cuidar*]'. They tell me: 'It's for the future. If I live today here in the present, hunting everything, I finish all the animals, and the children who are growing now, where are they going to go? What are they going to eat?'[149] Belén, a young woman from Puerto Quinche, also considers that the MAE is actually 'helping us by controlling hunting'. 'As my mum says, she adds, the one who wants to sell can sell plantain and yucca, not the bush meat! This is for

[141] 2/11/2016.
[142] Interview Josefina 18/01/2017.
[143] Interview Héctor 5/12/2016.
[144] Interview Luzila 11/11/2016.
[145] Conversation 17/10/2016.
[146] Interview Josefina 18/01/2017.
[147] The airsrip was built by Shell on the road between Tiputini and the community of Vicente Salazar.
[148] Interview 2/11/2016.
[149] Interview 13/12/2016.

our children'. According to Belén, indeed, the animals need a long time to reproduce.[150] And while most people consider hunting and fishing to be at the heart of the Quichua culture[151], Javier disagrees. 'I don't hunt and I don't fish anymore, he tells me. But it doesn't mean I have lost my culture.'[152] All in all, hunting and fishing are still common practice but made increasingly difficult by both the controls from the state and the scarcity of animals, which is an issue in terms of food provision, as well as a monetary one since hunting and fishing used to be a provider of cash for some of the inhabitants. Regarding the latter, it is common to hear that the state, if it forbids hunting and fishing, should give the people food[153] or money to buy food[154]. The *bono de desarrollo humano*, a conditional cash transfer put in place by the Correa government to help families in situation of economic vulnerability (worth 50 dollars per month and primarily towards the costs of health and education[155]), is seen by León as providing for such compensation: he considers, in particular, that 'Correa gives us *el mensual de alimentación*' [the monthly feeding][156]. Franco, on the other hand, complains: 'The only thing the government gives us is the *bono*. (…) But with 50 dollars, it's nothing in this world!'[157]. Maximiliano, a *socio* and President of Santa Teresita, similarly wonders: 'The MAE prohibits hunting but they are not helping us with agriculture. This is like a contradiction…'[158].

Food from the finca and from the shops

Agriculture, indeed, is the main provider of food in the communities. During my first visit in Vicente Salazar, as I ask the inhabitants how they make a living, they respond: 'We all have a

[150] Conversations 10-12/11/2016.
[151] *Talleres* Vicente Salazar 6/11/2016 and Puerto Quinche 10/11/2016.
[152] Interview 8/11/2016.
[153] Conversation Adriana 11/09/2016.
[154] Abraham 18/01/2017, Franco 2/11/2016.
[155] See the Ministry of economic and social inclusion website (*Ministerio de Inclusion Economica y Social*): https://www.inclusion.gob.ec/bono-de-desarrollo-humano-1/

[156] 11/11/2016.
[157] Interview 2/11/2016.
[158] Conversation 26/11/2016.

finca. We all cultivate. Yucca and plantain'[159]. The *finca* includes the Quichua house and the *chakra* [farm], which includes both cultivations and animals. Every family normally has one and it is private – as Edgar explains to me while taking me to his own *finca* in the community of Santa Rosa[160]. In Vicente Salazar, the sizes of the *fincas* range from one to ten hectares for each household – 7 hectares per household on average, according to the *plan de manejo*[161]. The inhabitants all grow yucca and plantain, sometimes cocoa, coffee and maize[162]. They also raise chicken, fishes, pigs and cattle.

The survey I conducted in Vicente Salazar during the *taller*[163] corroborated this data: it showed that almost all the *socios* cultivate plantain, yucca and maize (51 *socios* out of 62 for plantain, 47 for yucca and 43 for maize), while 15 *socios* (still out of 62) grow cocoa, 7 grow coffee and 9 grow rice. Cucumber, peanut, cane, pineapple, beans, oranges, tomatoes and herbs are rarer and are each cultivated by less than 4 *socios*. Finally, only 4 people (two households) do not cultivate anything. According to the same survey, almost everyone[164] raises chicken, 9 people raise hen, 14 people raise pigs and 14 people have cattle, 5 people have birds and finally, one person has horses and one has guinea pigs. Finally, 7 people do not raise any animals.

In addition to the food they cultivate, people also buy some products from the shops, such as salt, sugar ('for the breakfast' [165]), oil and butter, tomatoes and onions ('for the accompaniment'[166]) and sometimes rice (and beans) because, as Renato, an elderly Quichua man, *socio* of Vicente Salazar, explains to me: 'rice is very complicated to grow: you need to plant, then cook. (…) The young people don't care. But me, with my wife, not any more (…).

[159] Post-*asamblea* collective conversation 4/09/2016.
[160] 19/10/2016.
[161] 2016.
[162] 2016, p12.
[163] 6/11/2016.
[164] 41 *socios* out of 62 who responded the survey.
[165] Conversation Adriana 7/12/2016.
[166] *Taller* Puerto Quiche 10/11/2016.

We have to go and find it in the shop, and with our note'[167]. As Alma, a *socia* of Boca Tiputini, tells me: 'now the people get their food both from the *chakra* and from the shop.'[168]

Figure 29: One of the shops in Tiputini



Source: the author

The recent apparition of the shops in the village and communities is unambiguously seen as an improvement – as this comment from Zenaida, an elderly woman from Puerto Quinche, illustrates: 'Before we wouldn't buy those things [she's referring here to food and soap]. We needed them all the same, but there were no shops [to buy them].'[169] In Samona, where the (three) small shops are relatively new, Eliza, a *socia* of the community, tells me: 'Before, the ones who could go to Coca could buy stuff. And the others remained without a thing'[170]. And

[167] Interview 31/10/2016.
[168] Interview 25/11/2016.
[169] Interview 11/11/2016.
[170] Conversation 26/10/2016.

in Vicente Salazar, where there is no shop, Rosalía considers they are lacking[171]: the inhabitants need to walk to Tiputini, the village, to buy those items.

3. No *alcanza*: lack of money and the insufficiencies of agriculture

The *finca* is not only the main provider of food but the main (and often only) provider of cash for the inhabitants, who sell some of their products (yucca and plantain, maize, cocoa and coffee, but also rice and less commonly oranges, pineapples and cucumbers) in Tiputini, where the MAGAP has also put in place a *centro de acopio* (where cocoa, coffee and maize is bought from the inhabitants, stored and then sold outside the *ribera*), and organises a weekly *feria* [fair] on Saturdays. Some people also sell chicken, yucca and plantain to the local *comedores* – there are at least five of them in the village. In Vicente Salazar, the inhabitants estimate that they earn between 95 and 140 dollars monthly per household from agriculture[172]. During the collective conversation, they conclude: 'At the moment, *no alcanza* [it's not enough]'[173].

Lack of training from the institutions

People regularly complain about the 'insufficiencies' of agriculture: they do not produce enough, according to them, because of the lack of access to seeds and materials, training and follow-up – which are expected to be provided by the 'institutions'. Farming, indeed, is never more than a part time activity – to which most households dedicate a few hours daily early in the morning, often with the rest of the family, after which the weather is too hot to be working outside. For the Salma brothers, 'there is no development in agriculture, because there is no support from any institution'. They go on: 'there's no support from the government, nothing like that, so like to have agriculture we need for someone to help the community (…) [with] all which is seeds of rice, maize, all that, from all the crops which exist here, coffee, cocoa.'[174]

[171] Interview 31/10/2016.
[172] Survey conducted on 6/11/2016 in the community.
[173] 4/09/2016.
[174] Interview 27/01/2017

I often hear, in particular, about the lack of 'training' – which is considered, together with the lack of 'improved seeds', to be one of the factors limiting agricultural development by the *plan de manejo* of the community[175]. For Lopez, what is necessary 'would be a training from whichever institution (…) on how maize planting is, the coffee, etc. And Franco complains that 'we haven't had training in *talleres* on cocoa and coffee projects'[176]. The issue is, for him, that 'we do not know the technical part, and this is where the farmer falls… we don't know how much to irrigate, how many times, etc. there has never been a good *taller*.'[177]

While the MAGAP has been present in the region (*ribera*) since 2010, running agricultural 'projects' in all the communities of the *ribera*, including the provision of seeds and materials, training and follow-up, and while the inhabitants are also regularly given animals (chicken) by the provincial council, and materials by the *municipio* (boots and *machetes* in particular), they often consider it is not enough. Adriana, for instance, complains: 'the provincial Council gives us chicken, so that we can raise and sell them, and with this very money, buy more chicken'. 'But it's not enough, she says, because the *balanceado* [chicken's food] is very expensive!'[178] The expectation to obtain everything for free from the 'institutions', which greatly surprised me at first, is crucial to understand the relationships between the communities and the state as well as the expectations of the inhabitants. *El paternalismo* [paternalism] – name given to this practice by many outsiders and local state officials – is also key to understand the acceptance of oil and the water conflict in Samona – as I show in chapters 5 and 6.

Isolation and lack of means of transportation

Another issue is the absence of a market to sell their products, itself due to the isolation of the communities in the river and the scarcity and costs of transportation. During our interview,

[175] 2016, p12.
[176] Interview 16/11/2016.
[177] Conversation 19/01/2017.
[178] Conversation 7/12/2016.

Esteban, a *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar, tells me: 'agriculture is not working well because we don't have anywhere to go and sell the products.'[179] The lack of market to sell the products explains that the inhabitants do not produce food in large quantities. Rosalía, the President of Vicente Salazar, compliments: 'we can't work in quantity. We can only work *a medias* [half]. So that the products don't get rotten.'[180] And Franco and Carmina concur: 'if we had someone to buy us more, maybe one would cheer themselves to produce more, but because there isn't anyone to buy a lot, there is just to eat for the sustenance of the family.'[181]

While the community of Vicente Salazar has a road access to the village [see figure 30 below] as is the case with the communities which are closest to Tiputini[182], transporting heavy products to Tiputini is difficult for the majority of the inhabitants who do not have means of transportation – especially for the most isolated parts of the community (which territory spans 2,803.72 hectares[183]) with uneasy road access to both the community and the village, and from where people sometimes need to walk for many hours to reach Tiputini[184]. Moreover, access is only fluvial for most communities, situated on the other bank of the river or too far from the village to access it by road, where the majority of the inhabitants do not have personal means of fluvial transportation – and either rely on the few people in their communities who have their own canoe, or – when the costs of *gasolina* [petrol], prohibitive in the area, or issues of scarcity make this option impossible – sometimes use the boats from local state institutions which occasionally organise visits to the communities from Tiputini.

[179] Interview 26/01/2017.
[180] Interview 31/10/2016.
[181] Interview 26/01/2017.
[182] This is also the case of part of the community of Puerto Quinche, on the other side of Vicente Salazar [the second part of Puerto Quinche is on the other side of the river], the communities of Pando Chicta, next to Tiputini, Santa Rosa, on the other side of Pando Chicta and Santa Teresita, on the other side of Santa Rosa.
[183] P*lan de manejo* (2016) p2.
[184] Interviews Franco 2/11/2016 and Lopez 1/02/2017.

Moreover, the village of 500 inhabitants is considered too small a market. For the Salma brothers '[the market in Tiputini] is not large because there are many people selling'[185]. As the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar conclude: 'We sell our products in Tiputini but it's very little'[186].

Figure 30: Road between Vicente Salazar and Tiputini



Source: the author

[185] Interview 27/01/2017.
[186] Post-*asamblea* collective conversation 4/09/2016.

The closest large market is Coca, the capital of the Orellana Province, which is accessibly only through the river. A trip to Coca takes between 7 and 10 hours by boat (depending on the exact location of each community), with the *turno.* The trip is considered long and 'super expensive'[187]: 15 dollars from Nuevo Rocafuerte to Coca – which increased to 18.75 during my stay. From Coca, a trip to Quito, the capital city, takes 10 additional hours by bus.

Figure 31: The two *turnos* crossing each other in the middle of the Napo River



Source: the author

As a result, selling in Coca is often not seen as a profitable option by the inhabitants of the lower part of the river, who very uncommonly travel (and sell) outside the *ribera*[188]. And while the *plan de manejo*[189] points to the lack of market, and the costs of transportation to Coca as the main limitation of agriculture, discussions around the needs of the communities often revolve around access to markets and transportation more generally, within and between the

[187] Conversation Luciano 17/01/2017.
[188] Interview Bernardo, 16/11/2016; post-*asamblea* collective conversation Vicente Salazar 4/09/2016.
[189] 2016, p12.

communities in the *ribera* (terrestrial) and to connect them to Coca (fluvial): while Lopez and Franco would like a road to connect the village to the most remote parts of the community[190], Eloy wants a fixed bus to run every day between Vicente Salazar and Tiputini, but also a boat, 'like the *turno* but for free', which would go to Coca every day[191]. Dolores and Brunaco consider, for their part, that it would be good to 'have a canoe to be able to go and sell the products in Coca, and there in Coca, having a buyer who would buy everything from us'[192]. Better (faster and cheaper) fluvial transportation to reach Coca is also one of the main needs of the community of Puerto Quinche, according to its President, Bernardo.

He insists, however, that it wouldn't be desirable to build a road to Coca, for all the colonisation that would trigger[193]. Juan comments: 'the road destroys, if it comes from another canton. Custom, way of living, territory, environment. It's a disaster. The people are not prepared for that. They wouldn't protect it and the people would come in. (…) But within the canton, it could indeed help to have *caminos vecinales* [neighbouring paths].'[194] As always, those demands are addressed to the state (*municipio* in particular).

Need for (and lack of) jobs

As a result of the insufficiencies of agriculture, another recurrent complaint in the communities [where there is no oil extraction] is the lack of jobs. In Vicente Salazar, in addition to farming, some 15 people have a salaried job in the village, Tiputini – as Rosalía tells me and as is confirmed later by my survey (according to which 15 out of 62 respondents have a job in Vicente Salazar, including 9 'public servants', 4 teachers, one person (Francis, the 'doctor') working in construction and one lab technician). This is a relatively high number in the *ribera* and it is due, in this community, to the closeness (and road connection) to the village, as well

[190] Interviews Franco 2/11/2016 and Lopez 1/02/2017.
[191] Conversation 18/09/2016.
[192] Interview 26/01/2017.
[193] Interview 16/11/2016.
[194] interview 28/08/2016

as the relatively high level of education of the inhabitants, 40 per cent of whom are *mestizos*[195]. Rosalía clarifies: they are the ones who have a *bachiller* [in other words, the most educated ones], and they all work in the Municipality[196]. Indeed, the only jobs in the *ribera* are concentrated in Tiputini, and in the Municipality in particular – as Adriana, a *socia* of Santa Rosa, complains: 'The people who have a job, here, they all work in the Municipality. This is the only source of jobs'[197].

For Ulises and Lorenzo, two young *socios* of Puerto Miranda, the lack of jobs is equated to a state of poverty. They tell me: 'There are people who cannot work. The ones who can work, sure we are better. But the elderly remain poor (…) Because they do not have an income.'[198] And during my set of interviews in Boca Tiputini, all my interviewees but one tell me that there is poverty in the communities because of the absence of sources of jobs. For Mauricio: 'There's more poverty than in the rest of the country because there are no jobs here and in the rest of the country, there are.'[199] Again, jobs are expected to come from the state, and the oil company in particular. For Jaime, a *socio* of Pando Chicta [where there is no oil extraction yet either] who works himself in the *municipio*: 'there is no development because the people don't unite, together, to demand the oil companies and the government sources of jobs.'[200] In Boca Tiputini, where the oil project just started (in March 2016), Maribel and Alma both think that the President [of the republic] should support the inhabitants by giving them jobs[201]. And for Mauricio, 'The President of the republic should help us [getting out of poverty], by providing us with money and things.' He concludes that 'the company can give jobs'[202].

[195] *Plan de manejo* 2016, p10, figure 2.
[196] Interview 31/10/2016.
[197] Conversation 11/09/2016.
[198] Interview 2/09/2016.
[199] Interview 24/11/2016.
[200] Interview 25/01/2017.
[201] Interviews 25/11/2016.
[202] Interview 24/11/2016.

4. Money for bigger things

The need for money is not new in the communities – and as Franco tells me once, despite the fact there were no resources before, the people needed revenues all the same: 'for their children, for the education'[203], he adds. Franco still considers, however, that 'we do not have enough economic resources *para solventar las necesidades nuestras* [to address our necessities].'[204]

500 dollars monthly

According to Edgar – who left his job in the *municipio* as they decreased his salary, from 500ish to 400ish – 'here you need a monthly $500 to live well.'[205] Eduardo, a *socio* and secretary of Puerto Miranda who used to work for the *municipio* as a *motorista* [driver] for 240 dollars per month, considers that was 'very little'. He explains: 'It's not enough for the education of the children, *la escuela* [primary and secondary school], *el colegio* [high school], and from time to time, a small illness.'[206] He left the job, they called him back, and he now gets paid $470, which he seems satisfied with. In Yanayacu, finally, I hear from a father of 10 children that he would need at least 800 per month to buy the food and clothes for school[207].

With the money, the inhabitants buy few and precise items – in addition to food: clothes and shoes, things for the house (such as soap and aluminium utensils), alcohol (to share with the friends), petrol for their canoes (for those who have one), school materials[208] and some medicine. The list is almost always and everywhere the same, and it took me some time to

[203] Conversation 2/11/2016.
[204] Interview 16/11/2016.
[205] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[206] Conversation 17/01/2017.
[207] Interview 16/12/2016.
[208] While the *municipio* buys the notebooks for primary school students, the inhabitants still must buy the materials and uniforms. According to Jorge, a young man from Pando Chicta, this costs approximately 76 dollars per pupil: 28 for the trousers, 18 for the jersey and 30 for the shoes [Conversation 13/12/2016]. And according to Franco, 'the money, more than anything else, is for the education of our children' [Conversation 2/11/2016].

understand why the money from agriculture was not sufficient to meet them, and what 'necessities' Franco was referring to exactly.

Money is not all-purpose

There are many 'needs' in the communities, as the inhabitants keep repeating, more particularly in the domains of education, health, infrastructure and basic services, which are all valued, seen as 'lacking' and seen as necessary for the people to *salir adelante* – as I heard many times during my stay. Such needs cannot directly be fulfilled by 'nature' and I initially thought that was the reason why people needed more money. Only later did I understand that money is not seen as 'all-purpose' in the communities. Indeed, apart from a few precise items the inhabitants buy with their money in those domains (as listed above), the needs for education, health, infrastructure and basic services are not expected to be paid with individual money. Instead, and as suggested earlier with the example of drinking water, training in agriculture and means of transportation, the inhabitants often expect the 'institutions' to fulfil them, for free. And such expectations are sometimes based on legal responsibility – of the *municipio* or central state.

The desire to send the children to university provides another concrete illustration of these expectations. Education is seen as extremely important for the inhabitants of the *ribera*, who have rarely studied further than primary or secondary school[209] and want their children to go to university in order to *salir adelante*, 'be someone in their lives'[210] and occasionally 'change the community'[211]. The first time I met Adriana, she told me her *penultima* [second to last] daughter, 18 years old, was not going to go to university because Adriana had no money[212].

[209] Out of 62 people who answered my survey in Vicente Salazar, 30 had only finished primary school and 19 had studied in secondary school, while 3 had been to university (finished or not) and 5 had not studied. 2 were still high school students. The 'most educated' people I met had studied in university for one or two years, before they gave up because of the lack of money. I never met anyone, even among the *mestizos*, with a university degree.
[210] Interview Delia, *socia* Boca Tiputini, 25/11/2016.
[211] Interview Franco and Carmina 26/01/2017.
[212] Conversation 11/09/2016.

After primary and high school, she added later, only rich people can send their children to university because it costs a lot of money[213]. Francis explains to me: 'here there is no university, and you need to send your children to Quito. The university in Quito is free but only for the people from Quito. For us, we need to pay for the transport, the accommodation, the food. And it results too expensive.'[214] But while they often complain about the lack of money to send them to study outside of the *ribera*, in practice the inhabitants will rarely consider asking or using money for such purpose. Instead, what they demand is a university in the *ribera* (and sometimes in their own communities), 'for the poor'[215]. For Adriana, this is clearly the responsibility of the *municipio*. She asks me, around a *chicha* bowl during the *asamblea*: 'why they… [she hesitates], the Municipality, why don't they build a university here?' I return the question to her. She says: 'probably because they do not care? They want only rich people to go to school, the other ones stay here? They say everybody should study, etc.: but where?'[216] She continues: 'why are they not able to gather and decide this, in the *municipio, que se haga* [to make] a university here? A university for poor people from here? In Nuevo Rocafuerte or in Tiputini. I don't understand it. They say they are *preparados* [educated], but I don't know…'.

Live at another level

I finally understood while interviewing Sergio, the President of Samona, in the centre of his community. Sergio tells me: 'Here, we almost do not buy anything from outside, we need the salt, the match, the soap, and the bait for fishing. That's all. (…) Everyone in their *finca* they already have their work. And they sell a bit. They also have chicken, and they also sell them. They don't even have $100 per month, but it is sufficient to buy the soap, etc.' He continues: 'the job from the firm is to buy bigger things. A motor, a fridge, a *motosierra* [chainsaw].' He

[213] Conversation 7/12/2016.
[214] Conversation 28/08/2016.
[215] Conversation Adriana 11/09/2016.
[216] Conversation 11/09/2016

looks at the community school, a cement house with a zinc roof, and adds: 'even those roofs, you need to pay for them. It used to be just straw.'[217] And he concludes: 'Of course it is [important]! If you don't buy, you are nothing.'[218] In Samona, a community further up the river which overlaps oil block 31, in activity since 2000, one can find fridges, TVs and irons in the houses indeed. Canoes with motors and 'better houses' are the first items people buy as they receive the money from the *indemnización*. More generally, and regardless of whether they have the means to buy them or not, people aspire to a fibre canoe, a motor, a zinc roof, a gas kitchen, an electricity generator, a chainsaw, a TV, a radio and a phone. As Carlito, a *socio* of Vicente Salazar, puts it: 'People say there is no economy here… I believe it's not that, but that the people want money *para vivir a otro nivel ya* [to live at another level].'[219]

While I visit Franco in his house after a round of interviews in Vicente Salazar, he explains to me why people want televisions: 'It is through TV that we know about the news, what happens in the world. Before, we only knew through the ones who commented the news, the ones who had a television.'[220] Indeed, and as they like to comment, people know about things such as the decrease in the price of oil[221] or the existence of Margaret Thatcher and the conflict between Argentina and England for the Maldives[222] 'through TV, through the President'[223]. They often mention that they need 'to see the news on TV' – in Franco's case: to decide who he is going to vote for in the 2017 presidential election, as he does 'not like Correa anymore'[224]. Like Franco, most inhabitants aspire to have a TV. TVs are, however, too expensive for most inhabitants. Moreover, they require access to an electricity network – which most houses in most communities do not have access to. According to Gaspar, as a result, 'only the ones who

[217] 27/10/2016.
[218] Interview 27/10/2016
[219] Conversation 22/01/2017?
[220] Conversation 2/11/2016.
[221] Interview Misael 30/08/2016.
[222] Gaspar 31/10/2016.
[223] Interview Misael 30/08/2016.
[224] Conversation Franco 2/11/2016.

have some more resources' have a TV[225]. The same happens with the radio and according to Bernardo, President of Puerto Quinche: 'the one who wants to listen to some news, he buys his radio. Some *socios* bought [one], but it's few of them'. He concludes that 'There are hardly any radio nor TV in the community.'[226]

Figure 32: A TV in Eduardo's house in Puerto Miranda



Source: the author

[225] Conversation 31/10/2016.
[226] Interview 16/11/2016.

Better houses are particularly common demands in the communities. The inhabitants do not only want a house but a nice house, which often translates as a house with rectangular sticks of wood, and walls inside to separate between the different rooms. This means that they need to contract someone to cut the wood in the process of building the house. Belén considers that 'It's a bit expensive to build a house, if you want to make it nice'. 'For example, if you want rectangular sticks to make the walls and floor, you need the help of a cabinetmaker.' She has a private one who charges her 25 dollars for each day of work.[227] Delia, who has just built herself a house [with the money from the *indemnización* – some 6000 dollars per family in Boca Tiputini[228]], estimates that it costs at least 1,000 dollars even though you take the wood from the forest, because you have to pay for the *gasolina, el aceite* [oil], *la motosierra* [chainsaw], and often a worker to help whom you have to pay and feed.[229]

And while the typical Quichua wood house remains the norm[230], some people want a cement house. This is driven by two main considerations: the prohibitions from the MAE to cut down wood, on the one hand, and the duration on the other. Indeed, a typical wood house needs rebuilding every 10 to 30 years, which involves looking for the wood, working the wood, and building the house – a month's worth of work for one person alone, according to Edgar[231]. As Maribel, a *socia* of Boca Tiputini, puts it: 'Cement is better partly because it lasts longer, and partly because the wood can no longer be taken.'[232]

[227] Conversations 10-12/11/2016.
[228] See appendix II for official documents.
[229] Interview 25/11/2016.
[230] In Vicente Salazar, according to the *plan de manejo* (2016, p10) 64.4% of the houses are made of wood (most of them with a straw but some of them with a zinc roof), while 4.4% are made of cement, 4.4% are of 'ancestral construction' (i. e. made of straw and pambil), 2.2% are a mix of wood and cement and 2.2% are made of another material. Although this total is far from 100%, those figures give us an idea of the proportions.
[231] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[232] Interview 25/11/2016.

5. A discussion of poverty, culture and progress

Interestingly, many of the items people aspire to used to be made with materials which they could find in nature, for free. Due to the prohibitions from the MAE (to cut down wood in the forest), but also and mainly to concerns of quality and duration, saving energy and time, and status, they now need to buy them with money. I observed that materials for the house, and zinc roofs in particular, provide a great illustration of this tendency in the communities. As poverty is increasingly equated with the use of materials from the forest and the absence of money to buy substitute materials, the inhabitants keep reflecting on the fact that 'progress' is damaging of nature – as illustrated by the canoes with motors, which have replaced the wood paddles and are seen as an improvement while they pollute the river and scare the animals.

Zinc roofs and gas kitchens: culture as poverty

While the roof of a typical Quichua house is made of straw, the zinc is considered better because it does not get rotten[233] and thus lasts longer than the straw[234] which requires a lot of work to build – you need to go and look for the straw, 'far away where the *fincas* are'[235] and to build the roof[236] –, gets 'eaten by the rats'[237] and needs to be replaced every 10 years[238]. In that vein, E, while showing me the roof of his house, comments: 'the straw is four years old already in the kitchen and we need to change it'[239]. The zinc, on the other hand, is obviously too hot for the Amazonian climate, and very noisy under the rain – a reason for which León, an elderly Quichua man from Puerto Quinche, considers that 'to be fresher [in the house], the straw is better'. But other *socios*, during the *taller*, insist that 'the zinc lasts longer'[240]. This leads

[233] Interview Sergio 27/10/2016.
[234] Interview Valentin 17/12/2016, conversation with Ramiro and young guys in Samona 1/12/2016, *taller* Vicente Salazar 6/11/2016.
[235] Conversation with Ramiro and young guys in Samona 1/12/2016
[236] Interview Renato 31/10/2016
[237] Interview León 11/11/2016
[238] Interview Bernardo 16/11/2016 and *taller* Vicente Salazar 6/11/2016].
[239] Conversation 17/01/2017
[240] *Taller* 10/11/2016.

Ignacio, a sociologist working in the DRC for PAM, to consider the desire for zinc roofs as 'aspirational' – 'when you feel like something will help you reach another status. For them, it's like that', he explains, as we discuss inside the cement house I am staying in in the community of Samona. Belén has a different explanation. For her: 'The zinc roof is very warm for this climate. But it lasts longer, and the straw, you need to go and look for it far, it takes more time. So the people prefer to bear the heat and to have a roof which lasts.'[241] Javier concludes: 'It's better to have a zinc house. In my house, I do have zinc, but with some plastic on a side to compensate for the heat.'[242]

While León maintains that the straw roof is better because 'it's our culture' – although he insists that 'both are good'[243] – he also observes that the rich people have zinc and the poor have straw, and concludes: 'Straw for the poor, zinc for the rich'[244]. As he answers explicitly later [to my collective question 'is it important to preserve the culture?']: 'We go on with our culture because we lack economic resources.'[245] As I ask him which is most important, he maintains, however, that *seguir con la cultura* [going on with the culture] is more important [than economic resources]: '*Porque asi es la vida de nosotros, de los indígenas* [because this is how our life is, the life of the indigenous people]'. For Javier, the straw is not culture but poverty – while, in his own words, 'the Quichua culture is not to be poor'. He adds: 'have you seen people's roofs now? They leave them dumped in the middle. What is this? Is this culture? This is *pereza*! [laziness]'. He concludes: I don't like it when people come to say that here, everything's good, and that we need to continue living like that. The *indígena* too has the right to progress. What is really important is to reach progress without losing our culture'[246].

[241] Conversations 10-12/11/2016.
[242] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[243] Interview 11/11/2016.
[244] 10/11/2016.
[245] *Taller* Puerto Quinche 10/11/2016
[246] Conversation 2/11/2016.

Figure 33: Inside of a wood house with a straw roof (first picture) and firewood kitchen (second picture) [Eduardo's house in Puerto Miranda]





Source: the author

The preference for gas kitchen (over the traditional firewood) is driven by the same considerations of ease. 'Before, Javier explains to me, we would all go and look for the wood

(…) It was far.'[247] It also bears a practical aspect, related to the climate: Belén, who has both firewood and gas in her kitchen, explains to me that 'when it rains it's difficult to cook with the firewood, because the wood gets wet'. So she would cook with gas, but put the fire in the wood to help maintaining the straw of the roof[248]. As Silvia points out during the *taller*, it is also fostered by the same prohibitions from the state: 'they do it because of the prohibitions of cutting down trees. From the MAE.'[249] On the other hand, I was often told that the food cooked with the gas kitchen was less tasty than with the traditional firewood. In Vicente Salazar, a group of women considers it was a bad change as a result. One of them says: 'with the firewood cooker, I do much more than with gas. And the food is better'[250]. concludes the dilemma that way: 'The firewood is better. The food is better. The gas is easier but it's only in case there is an emergency.'[251] Gas cookers also need to be bought, in addition to the gas which is delivered by boat, once a month, in the communities. According to Rosalía, as a result, 'the majority have firewood, but the young people who have a bit of money to buy gas do buy gas. The wood is free, but the gas is faster', she summarizes[252].

All in all few people – only the 'rich' – can afford to buy a gas kitchen or a zinc roof, at least in the communities where there is no oil extraction, *indemnización* and compensation.

Poor because no good houses and poverty as lack of money

It is common to hear, in the communities, that the people are poor because they do not have money and they do not have good houses. When I ask, in the *taller* in Vicente Salazar, whether there is much poverty in the communities, Gaspar says: 'well, for my part, I think that no' and a woman adds: 'poor is the one who does not want to work'. They all conclude that 'no, there

[247] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[248] Her roof is made of both straw (above the kitchen) and zinc (in other parts of the house) [Conversations 10-12/11/2016].
[249] 6/11/2016.
[250] *Taller* 6/11/2016.
[251] Interview 18/01/2017 with her son Abraham.
[252] Interview 31/10/2016.

is no poverty!'. Esteban adds: 'Lots of politicians have used that word of poverty. *Para ganar campos* [to gain some field]. Poverty, for instance, there is in the big cities. Which do not have anything. This is being poor. *Nosotros*, we do not have all that!' And he shows me the land[253]. According to the women in Puerto Quinche, similarly: 'There isn't [poverty here]. Because we have everything. We all work.' When I ask for clarification, they confirm that, by work, they mean the work of the *finca* [agricultural work]. They also explain that 'poverty' is 'the lack of cultivations'[254]. The fact that 'there is poverty only for the ones who do not go to work [in the *finca*]'[255] is something I often hear in the communities. But when I ask the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar what poverty means for them, one man responds: 'the lack of economic resources'. To that same question during the *taller* in Puerto Quinche, León takes the floor and says: 'Some people, and I include myself, for lack of resources, and for not knowing how to think, not knowing how to save well [the money], we are lacking economic resources. If we knew how to save money, we would have good houses.'[256] He goes on, during an interview in his house the following day: 'We didn't know what a bank was, a cooperative… we haven't taken advantage of that. Sure we're poor, because we have nothing, we don't have a good house.'[257] Domingo also considers there is much poverty in his community, Boca Tiputini, because: 'the people do not have houses, like you know, adequate, the houses are old already, like destroyed'[258]. And in an attempt to clarify what he meant earlier by poverty, Juan tells me: 'here, no one dies of hunger. (…) [They are poor] because they want what you have. Or what I have: a cement house. And they can't have it.'[259]

[253] *Taller* 6/11/2016.
[254] Women during the *taller* in Puerto Quinche 10/11/2016.
[255] Interview Delia 25/11/2016.
[256] 10/11/2016.
[257] Interview León 11/11/2016.
[258] Interview 25/11/2016.
[259] Interview 28/08/2016

Figure 34: A wood house (with walls inside and a zinc roof) in Fronteras del Ecuador



Source: the author

Francis disagrees with such conception. For him, '*aquí pobreza no hay* [there is no poverty here]' because 'poverty is when one doesn't have anything! Here there aren't poor people. The people have enough to eat, they have the health, they have the education.' 'The people here tell you they are poor because what they want is westernisation. For instance in your country, you have a car and that's the norm. Here (in Ecuador) it's not. They want better clothes, bigger and nicer houses. But this, for me, is not poverty.' This is the result, he believes, of the 'influence of outside': 'the people tell you they are poor also because other people put that into their heads. Sometimes, there are politicians who want to win elections and they deceive you. They tell the people that they are poor, that they need jobs because not having a job is poverty.'[260] And for Javier, the issue is consumerism. As he explained to me many times, 'Now there's also the boom of consumerism: it's a threat because the citizen doesn't know what to do, and this can

[260] Conversation 30/08/2016.

end up in robbery etc. Here, the poorest guy wants a motor 40. And doesn't realise this is consumerism. I have my small motor, for my family's sustenance, and I'm fine.'[261].

Progress as damaging of nature?

In a similar way, motors are increasingly replacing the wood paddles and canoes with motors are often considered an improvement in the communities, because of the ease, comfort and time saving in particular[262]. Noa tells me: 'Before, there were no motors. They had to paddle until Coca. It would take them 15 days sometimes.' He considers, as many other inhabitants, that 'it is 'much better today.'[263] Sebastián, an elderly Quichua man from Puerto Miranda, concurs: 'Now it's better. Before, there were no motors. We were isolated. There was nowhere to go and buy. Butter, salt, we needed to go to Peru! Or we had to buy at Pando's, he had the shop of the river.' He concludes: 'Today we live well. We have motors, everything.'[264] During my interview with him as part of the update of the ESH, in his house, Noa recalls in more details: '*Pucha* [gosh] it was like 4-5 days to get to Coca. (…). 8 days to get to Misahuallí, sometimes 15 days (…). The people would sleep in the banks [of the river], and they would eat meat that they would hunt, in the banks of the river too. There were lots of animals.'[265]

Some inhabitants, however, mention and reflect on the fact that the motors are damaging of the environment: they are responsible for the pollution of the river and scare the animals. To Noa's comment, Franco, with whom I have just travelled to Noa's house on his canoe with wood paddles – because Noa lives along a very small part of an estuary which according to Franco

[261] 8/11/2016.
[262] In practice very few people can afford a canoe with motor: the smallest and cheapest canoes, 12 meters long, cost 1,500 dollars while the motors are worth between 3,700 dollars for the least expensive ones (15 horsepower, also called *peco*) and 4,500 dollars for the most expensive ones (40 horsepower, also called *motor 40*) [Online conversation with Aurelio 28/01/2019].
[263] Conversation 17/10/2016 – in Juan's house in Tiputini, after his attendance to the *encuentros de la tercera edad* [a weekly meeting for the elderly] and before walking back to his house in Vicente Salazar.
[264] Interview 18/01/2017.
[265] Interview 2/11/2016.

could not be crossed with the motor-canoe[266] – responds: 'now it's only motor, but on the other hand too, I see it as very… there it would be losing our customs. Because driving with paddles was saner, isn't it?' When I ask him what he means by 'saner', he replies: 'Because you wouldn't make so much noise for the animals. Now they flee.'[267] And Gaspar, his brother, comments: 'for the ease [this is a good change].' 'But on the other hand, he adds, with the paddle they didn't contaminate and they could hunt there, silently.'[268]

Figure 35: Edgar's fibre canoe



Source: the author

During the *taller* in Puerto Quinche, I also hear that 'it was better with paddles. Now, sometimes, we cannot move because we do not have *gasolina* [petrol], or we don't have someone to drive us.' Another woman comments that both [motor and paddle] are still used[269]. In the same way, Celia, an elderly Quichua woman, complains that the custom is getting lost

[266] See figure 20 in methods chapter.
[267] Conversation 2/11/2016.
[268] *Taller* Vicente Salazar 6/11/2016.
[269] *Taller* Puerto Quinche 10/11/2016.

because everything is becoming very 'modern'. Belén, her niece, translates for me: 'in the navigation custom, for instance, with the motors.' I ask her whether that has been a bad change. Belén does not wait for her aunt to reply. She says: 'but the navigation is necessary! It's less work and less sacrifice.' As I insist a little to know whether she perceives modernity as something positive, her answer is illustrative of the inevitability of change (on which I come back in chapter 7): '*Que más toca?* [what else is there?]'[270]

6. Summary and discussion: changing needs, changing values and cultural 'difference' in motion?

Summary

The chapter investigates the changing relationship between people and nature by looking at 5 domains where nature is used as a source of livelihood and/or cultural identity. 1) Water. People depend on the river for their water consumption but it is polluted (because, notably, of previous oil extraction projects) and alternative options, expected to be provided by the state, for free, are insufficient. Moreover, people want drinking water. There is no drinking water in the communities, but drinking water can come with oil extraction, as I will show in the second empirical chapter.

2) Food. Hunting and fishing are limited by both the new controls from the MAE and the increasing scarcity of fishes and animals – which is an issue in terms of food provision but also a monetary one since the inhabitants used to sell the meat and fish in the *ribera*. Most of the food in the communities comes from the *finca*, but also increasingly from the shops which are new, sell more diverse products and are considered to be an improvement by the inhabitants although they are still scarce and 'lacking' in Vicente Salazar.

[270] Conversation 12/11/2016.

3) Money. While the *finca* is also the main provider of money in the communities (some 100 dollars per month per household), it does not *alcanza*: agriculture is not sufficient because of the lack of support from the institutions (training, seeds and materials) and the isolation of the communities of the *ribera* from the main markets of the country – the closest one in Coca, 300 kilometres up the river. As a result, the inhabitants consider they are lacking training, seeds and materials, but also boats and other means of transportation. Others consider, as a result of the insufficiencies of agriculture, that they are lacking jobs. Here again, everything which is missing is expected to be provided by the state, for free. The state is the only source of the few jobs in the *ribera* and, as I will show in the second empirical chapter, jobs for the local inhabitants are one of the main benefits of oil extraction.

4) Bigger things. People consider they need some 500 dollars per month in order to buy some precise items in the domains of food, education and health, but also and as I increasingly understand, to buy 'bigger things' (a fibre canoe, a motor, a zinc roof, a gas kitchen, an electricity generator, a chainsaw, a TV, a radio and a phone).

5) Materials for the house are increasingly demanded by the inhabitants out of concerns of quality, duration, saving time and energy, and status. In particular, zinc roofs and gas kitchen are two great illustrations of the growing need for materials which need to be paid for to replace materials which used to be found in the forest, as well as a changing conception of poverty which is increasingly equated with the use of materials from the forest – in this case the straw and the wood, which are often considered 'cultural' – and the absence of money to buy substitute materials. The same goes for the canoes with motors, which are seen as an improvement despite the fact that they pollute the river and scare the animals. As 'culture' is increasingly confused with 'poverty', progress is damaging of nature and the inhabitants keep reflecting on and debating whether specific changes have been good or bad for the community.

Discussion

At one level, the chapter suggests that nature is increasingly less sufficient as a source of livelihood because of a new scarcity, which is co-created between the state and oil companies (with controls from the MAE and pollution, which partly comes from oil projects further up the river and exploration in the ITT area) and the inhabitants themselves (with overhunting, overpopulation and changing lifestyles which are seen as damaging of the environment – the use of boats with motors on the river for instance). But natural resources such as the water from the river, the animals and the wood from the forest are not only increasingly scarce, affected or difficult to access. They are also increasingly insufficient to meet the growing needs of the inhabitants for ease, duration, saving time and status. The demand for 'nice houses' makes it quite clear that the inhabitants desire progress rather than just maintaining their subsistence livelihoods. Such demand is less explicit but equally present in the demands for drinking water, embedded in a certain conception of progress which is increasingly important in the *ribera* [and on which I come back in the next chapter] and for more varied food and shops. Those new needs are probably not independent from the presence of the oil companies in the *ribera*[271] and the kind of benefits they come to offer to some of the neighbouring communities (money and jobs but also drinking water and other 'basic services', benefits in the domains of infrastructure, health and education and 'projects', notably agricultural[272]) – as I mention in the next empirical chapter. The increased need for commodities in the region in general might be explained by the increased presence of *mestizos* in the *ribera*, who came from less isolated parts of Ecuador where more commodities were available, and its origins could be traced back to the period of the rubber boom, when Quichua settlers who worked with the patrons and used to be paid in 'stuff' (such as axes, machetes, shotguns and clothes – see Muratorio 1991) arrived from Tena.

[271] In block 31 since 2000 already, and more recently in some communities inside the ITT block.
[272] See appendix I for the list of benefits given to the six communities inside the ITT block as part of the social compensation from the ITT oil project.

In the same way, the fact that people consider they need 500 dollars per month to live well (which corresponds to the highest wage they can get, when they work in seismic study for the oil companies) is probably not independent from the presence of the oil companies in the *ribera*. In any case, the chapter highlights how nature becomes increasingly insufficient to meet the needs of the inhabitants as a result of both material and ecological state of the communities and the changing values of the inhabitants. The latter includes a changing conception of poverty which is increasingly reframed, from lack of food, to lack of money, jobs and good houses. As Francis, Juan and Javier suggest, such conception of poverty probably comes from outside to a great extent. For them, as I would understand little by little (and as I develop in the next chapters), poverty is about lacking access to good education, health and all the basic services – which are seen as necessary for the people to *salir adelante* (a view which is highly coherent with both Correa's discourse on poverty and development, in the Amazon region in particular, and the discourse of the oil company which I investigate in the next empirical chapter). The heterogeneity which is found within the communities and the ambivalences of some *socios* towards hunting, zinc roofs, gas kitchens and motors, suggests that values are in movement. Moreover, they seem to go in one direction as what is cultural and traditional (and comes from nature for free) is increasingly being reframed as poverty and lack of progress.

At a second level, these examples illustrate how money and state provision can 'replace' the use of nature as a source of livelihood and how, in turn, the need for money, jobs and state provision partly arises as a consequence of scarcity in nature and as a result of the weakening of the subsistence economy. This is especially visible in the case of the pollution of the Napo River, which fosters the demand for drinking water. It is also visible through the demands of the inhabitants for training and agricultural 'projects', better (cheaper and faster) means of transportation, and money and jobs – all lacking due to the limitations on hunting and fishing and the insufficiencies of agriculture, which are not only providers of food but money in the

communities. This explains why their use can be 'replaced' by money – leaving aside the role of those activities as providers of 'cultural identity' which will be further explored later in the thesis (as the *finca* is threatened directly in particular). The need for new materials for the house reflects, to a certain extent, the same tendency, since it is partly fostered by the controls from the MAE on cutting down wood. Thus, as nature is increasingly insufficient as a provider of livelihood, people are increasingly dependent on money and the state – which, in this case, almost always refers to the *municipio,* over-present and relatively absent at the same time. I was often surprised to see how much is expected of the state, which is both the main source of scarcity in nature in the *ribera* and is often seen as the unique potential source of solutions to such scarcity by the inhabitants. Indeed, not only the *municipio* is expected to provide everything for free (which many *mestizos* refer to as 'paternalism' and often described as a cultural trait of the Quichua inhabitants of the region[273]) but it is, in practice, the main provider of everything the inhabitants need in the domain of education, health, infrastructure and 'basic services', and even in 'training' (in agriculture notably) in a context where individual money is only seen as being meant to buy some specific and individual items, often in the domain of technology and materials for the house and transportation. At the same time, provision is often partial, heterogeneous and low quality – as illustrated in the chapter with water provision, which is heterogeneous, often only reaches the centres of the communities and is never 'drinkable', and as equally true in the domains of education, health, and electricity provision.

More implicitly, and at a third level, the chapter suggests that progress is also damaging of nature. Indeed, some of the 'bigger things' people desire already go against a certain relationship with nature, as illustrated by the examples of roads (which, as Juan suggests, would

[273] This 'paternalism' (the dependency on and expectations of the *mestizos* that still exists today, towards the state and the oil company) could actually be a legacy of relationships with the patrons, who used to provide the people with the things they needed in exchange for their work, while they were often the only alternative to obtain the desired commodities. This is a hypothesis which would require further investigation.

‘destroy’ the place) and the canoes with motors which in the words of the inhabitants are responsible for the pollution of the river and scare the animals. In that vein, the chapter also suggests already a certain tension between progress and culture, or ‘equality’ and ‘difference’, for the inhabitants of the *ribera* – which will be accelerated in an oil extraction context and which I explore further in the thesis. I come back on such tension in chapter 7 more specifically.

From a theoretical perspective, the chapter shows that uses and values of nature as a source of livelihood and cultural identity (ecological and cultural ‘difference’ in political ecology’s vocabulary) are not fixed. In the *ribera* they are in movement and have to be assessed against many other aspects of people’s lives. There are many things in the balance and, often, a dilemma. Indeed, not only ecological and cultural ‘difference’ coexists with development aspirations (and the desire to *salir adelante*) but they are in dialogue and often in tension. While limitations on the use of nature tends to feed the need for money and state provision, the latter in turn renders the former increasingly insufficient. In that sense, this chapter already highlights a certain inevitability of change – despite the struggles and tensions change comes with. Both the tension and inevitability will be amplified by the entrance of PAM in the communities and will be developed throughout the empirical story.

All in all, the chapter suggests that if the inhabitants of the Lower Napo River depend on nature as a source of livelihood and cultural identity, nature is no longer (and increasingly less) sufficient to fulfil their needs, in a context where subsistence livelihoods (culture) are increasingly equated to lack of progress and poverty by the inhabitants themselves – which is reframed as lack of money, good houses and jobs. They increasingly rely on individual money and state provision, as a result, and the relative scarcity of both means they are effectively in a limbo (where nature and the subsistence economy are no longer sufficient but there is not enough cash for people to fulfil their needs either) and a state of poverty. The entrance of PAM in the community in such context will be a response to some of the claims of the inhabitants.

It will, at the same time (and because of the tension between ‘difference’ and ‘equality’ suggested here), come to further weaken an already weakened subsistence economy. Thus, the chapter also sets the context for the reader to understand the acceptance of oil in the next, second empirical chapter, as oil comes to fulfil people’s needs – for jobs and cash in particular – while furthering already existing issues which it will also have the ability to ‘compensate’ for (through the social compensation and more particularly with drinking water).

Chapter 5. '*Ya estamos jodidos'*: Oil as an asymmetric dilemma and the inevitability of acceptance (second empirical chapter)

Introduction: a new seismic study in Vicente Salazar (January 2017)

In the previous chapter I explored the (changing) relationship and use of the environment (and resulting demands for money and state provision) by the inhabitants of the Quichua community of Vicente Salazar, outside of the ITT oil block. The oil company would finally enter the community of Vicente Salazar at the very end of my stay (January 2017), during the monthly *minga* of the community, to announce a new seismic study in blocks 43 (ITT) and 31, this time overlapping the territory of Vicente Salazar – which would be *socializado* ('socialized') to the community by the oil company the following month, in February 2017.

There isn't really any kind of reaction or debate following the news that the *sísmica* [seismic study] is coming, after the *minga*. People talk about other things, they drink, play volley and football. Today, they stay longer than usual. Salvador, Noa's son, has come back to the community, with his Spanish friend Jonas, after living in Spain for 15 years. People are celebrating his return. There is beer and a good atmosphere. Johnny tells me: 'when there is movement, the people stay'. They seem happy, but just like they always do. I ask Carmina how she feels about the *sísmica*. 'They need to hurry up because I don't have money to buy myself trousers.'[274], she tells me. After the *minga*, I sit down and discuss the event with Johnny. I ask him whether the community is going to organise a vote. He answers negatively, before adding: 'as I already told you, if they don't exploit today, they'll do it tomorrow. So better taking advantage of it now.' And he adds: 'It's not like we are going to oppose, what it's all about is negotiating what we wanna ask.'[275] And a few days after the *minga*, Juan tells me: 'In my community, no one is going to oppose [oil extraction]. Because it's money and source of jobs.

[274] 22/01/2017
[275] Conversation 22/01/2017.

How come will they oppose, if the people don't have anywhere to poop? We are fed up with making small holes in the bushes.'[276] As I use the opportunity to ask the inhabitants what they are going to respond to the entrance of oil extraction in their territory – by which I mean: are you going to say yes or no? – they invariably respond with the kinds of benefits they are going to ask. As I reframe my question to ask whether the people are going to accept or oppose the entrance of PAM, I finally understand that my question makes no sense in this situation.

Everything I saw and heard in the *ribera* confirmed what Humberto, a sociologist working as a consultant for PAM told me on my second day in Tiputini: 'in five years working in the Amazon with indigenous people, I have never seen a community against an oil project.'[277] In this chapter, I investigate the reasons why the communities of the *ribera* invariably seem to accept the entrance of the oil company in their territories – while the negotiations with the company revolve around what to ask as part of the social compensation, in a context where oil extraction is almost always reframed as a provider of benefits despite the environmental impacts it comes with. In order to do so, I investigate the nature, consequences and timeframe of the environmental impacts – just as I did in the communities in order to understand oil decisions, and the apparent inevitability of acceptance in particular. Such investigation allows me shedding light on the asymmetry between the 'impacts' and the 'benefits' from oil and explaining the collective acceptance [of oil] by the communities of the *ribera*.

The chapter also describes how oil extraction leads to the provision of drinking water as the next logical step for the communities of the *ribera*, the consequences of which will be analysed in the subsequent chapters where I show that the biggest impacts from oil are long term and indirect and arise as the provision of drinking water (and other 'basic services') slowly transforms the inhabitants into wage labourers and their communities into small villages.

[276] Conversation 24/01/2017.
[277] Conversation 26/08/2016.

The chapter is divided into four parts. I show in a first section that beyond the lack of power to say no (which is real), everyone is in favour because of the benefits oil comes with and despite the expected environmental impacts. In section 2 I argue that if oil comes to further impacts on the (already polluted) river and (already damaged) forest, most of the expected impacts come before (and potentially without) the benefits, for the communities outside but next to the ITT block – such as Vicente Salazar, Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta at the time of my stay – which share the same Napo River and forest. On the other hand, the largest impacts on the river, forest and *finca* are expected in the long run, when the inhabitants say they could move to another part of the territory. In section 3 I explain that most of the communities ask for drinking water as part of the 'social compensation' from oil, which means oil comes with solutions for its own impacts, but also for the long standing ecological and health issue that the pollution of the Napo River represents in the communities – reinforcing both the asymmetry of the oil package and the inevitability of acceptance while setting the stage for the [indirect] consequences of oil on people and territories explored in the subsequent chapters. I discuss the asymmetry of the oil dilemma and resulting inevitability of acceptance in a fourth section.

The chapter mostly draws on data I gathered in the community of Vicente Salazar, but also Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta, all outside but next to the ITT block during my fieldwork, and all about to be included in the new round of seismic study in blocks 31 and 43 (ITT) which started in February 2017 and was operated by state oil company PAM. I contrast those findings with the situation and data I also gathered in three of the six communities where PAM had already entered in March 2016 to conduct the seismic study in the ITT block (Boca Tiputini, Puerto Quiche and Puerto Miranda) – which often helps me confirm or making sense of the situation in Vicente Salazar. Finally, and where relevant, I travel to the community of Samona, where Petrobras, a Brazilian firm, entered in 2000 for the seismic study in block 31.

Figure 36: Opening of the *mesa de información* in Boca Tiputini, September 2016



Source: the author (photo taken for Petroamazonas)

Figure 37: Homero analysing the map of the new seismic study during the *mesa de participación* in Llanchama, February 2017



Source: the author

1. No one is against

I had already discussed oil extraction with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar. The first time was during a collective conversation I had organised following the monthly *asamblea* (where I had been invited in September 2016). The inhabitants complained about the lack of benefits and kept telling me they were '*afectados'* [affected] by the ITT oil project, of which they were not part yet. As I asked in which ways they were *afectados,* Esteban responded: 'we are affected because I personally worked for the oil firm, as a driver, and they never paid me'. Another man added: '*afectados* because we don't have a job'. And he insisted: 'the affectation is 100%, because they do not give us a job!' Francis intervened: 'they build houses and things everywhere with this money from the oil from here. We see it in the news. But here, nothing!'[278] I asked the inhabitants whether they had heard of an environmental impact. Someone said: 'Yes, sure, but it should be minimal'. Another *socio* mentioned '*el uno por 1000'* [One out of 1000 – referring to Correa's famous slogan stating that the ITT oil extraction project will affect only 1/1000 of the YNP]. And Johnny told me about the promise of the government, in the Constitution, to protect nature. Another *socio* said: 'According to them [the oil firm], there is none. But in reality, I think there must be some'. As I dug a little bit more into the question of the environmental impacts during subsequent interviews with the inhabitants, I heard that 'they come to destroy our forest'[279], 'they come to destroy us'[280], 'they come and damage the environment with the pollution, they come and harm us here, (…) they come with pollution, destroying the animals'[281], '*solo nos vienen a contaminar* [they only come to pollute us]'[282],

[278] 4/09/2016.
[279] Interview Franco 26/01/2017.
[280] Conversation Carlito 22/01/2017.
[281] Interview Salma brothers 27/01/2017.
[282] Conversation Eloy 18/09/2016.

'they are destroying everything'[283] [etc][284]. Francis concluded that he could already see the damage in the river due to the boats from the company.

Oil comes to destroy: Discourse of minimal impact between lack of trust, hope and threat

This narrative in crescendo is representative of what I heard in the communities during my stay. In Vicente Salazar and the communities of the lower part of the river, the state official discourse on minimal environmental impact (EIA, *el uno por mil, tecnología de punta* [cutting-edge technology] and controls from the MAE) translates, in people's descriptions of the expected impact, into some room for hope – that this time and company might be different. Lack of trust in the oil company, the state and its different institutions, however, added to the lack of information, means that hope is often intertwined with threat and a sense that anything could happen anytime, resulting mostly in a lot of uncertainty and powerlessness.

Franco, who thinks that 'There's much pollution!' also tells me that 'now, supposedly, they do a study of environmental impact'. For Baltazar, another *socio* of Vicente Salazar, this clearly means that 'they will maintain the environment for us, they carry a study and all that. They will leave it as they found it, for instance they do a study [to see] if the land is polluted or the water, they will leave [it] as they found [it].'[285] Franco, however, is puzzled. He tells me: '*Pero aquí yo me pongo a pensar* [but here, I start thinking], …oil is from the state, and the money is for them. The same state does the study. It's like a round! There's something I don't get.' [286]

Similarly, the inhabitants often mention the argument of the *tecnología de punta* ('of the Chinese'[287]), with different levels of scepticism, and contrast it with past practices of the oil

[283] Interview Valentin, 17/12/2016.
[284] Though one of the stated goals of the Yasuní-ITT initiative was to mitigate CO2 emissions and climate change (see history chapter), the expected impacts of oil extraction in the Lower Napo River are always framed as 'local' (pollution, destruction, disappearance etc.), and the emphasis is often put on what is visible, as illustrated by the quotes above.
[285] Interview 5/02/2017.
[286] Conversation 2/11/2016.
[287] Sinopec, a Chinese oil company, is the main subcontractor of PAM in the ITT block.

companies, emphasising on the fact that there is more environmental care today. In that vein, one *socio* of Santa Rosa, who worked for subcontractors of PAM in the past and tells me about Texaco, the *piscinas* [pools] left open, and other things he has seen in oil company, considers that 'before, there was no environmental care at all (…). Now you can see that there's more'[288]. For Edgar, a *socio* of Santa Rosa who has also worked for various oil companies, 'it is no longer as before. It's much better'. He adds: 'I think the technology of the Chinese people is good. There won't be much contamination'[289]. Baltazar also tells me: 'precisely we agreed on the environment, that they meet what they are offering, because the firms now those days, how it was before they would offer but did not comply [with], now we'll see with that one.'[290]

The Salma brothers, *mestizos* and *socios* of Vicente Salazar, are a bit more sceptical. 'They claim that as the Chinese are in charge of all the oil wells, they tell me, [and they] are bringing a very developed technology of them, that there is no pollution, but we're going to see if nothing happens'[291]. And for Lopez, a *socio* of the community who has also worked for various oil companies, as a foreman, it is not possible to trust the firm: 'This, I can't crack because I haven't worked. (…) Because I tell you, when one works, one can tell the truth, but now you ask to another person who doesn't know, and they can even lie to you'[292]. When the people believe in the possibility of a clean extraction, there is sometimes a sense that the amount of environmental impact depends on the will of the oil workers to take care of nature. In that vein, Eloy considers that if the workers were hired locally, they would not damage the territory because they care about it: 'Now they are contracting people from outside, Quito and Guayaquil, who take their money and leave. They do not care about here. On the other hand, if they contract

[288] Conversation 11/09/2016. Texaco was sometimes mentioned, either to contrast the past (environmentally damaging) practices of oil firm with current ones, or on the contrary as a way to predict the environmental impacts which might come with the current oil project, included cancers.
[289] Conversation 28/01/2017.
[290] Interview 5/02/2017.
[291] Interview 27/01/2017.
[292] Interview 1/02/2017.

people from here, we'll take care of the environment. Instead of making a well here, we'll put it there. Because we know the place, and because we do care.'[293] For Gaspar, finally, the pollution problems are something the inhabitants need to 'discuss and make sure of'[294].

There is sometimes, indeed, a sense that the impacts can be negotiated and discussed and that the firm and its actions could be controlled by the inhabitants, who could then denounce them if they are not adequate. For Baltazar: 'they have to comply with what they offer, and in case they don't comply with what they have promised, we have the right to denounce them (…) to the Ministry of the Environment'. He goes on and says: 'as I was explaining you, we will get someone out of the community ourselves, to follow how the movement is of what they are doing'[295] According to most inhabitants, however, it is 'very hard' to complain about the impact. 'There are some offices where you can complain in Coca. But it should be here!', someone says during the collective conversation in Vicente Salazar. 'And then, you have no guarantee that they are going to take you into account'[296], Francis adds. Indeed, the efficiency of such mechanisms of control and complaints is further dependent on the belief that the firm or the state will do something about them. Most people do not seem to believe the state would even care if there was an impact. Such lack of trust is sometimes based on past experience: Noa and Franco recall that, after the oil spill[297], 'No one would give us even a gallon of water, no, no. No one was concerned about us. We had to take the water from the ravine. The water from the ravine was better'[298]. Edgar, about the same spill, remembers that no one, 'neither the Municipality, nor anyone, worried about the people.'[299]

[293] Conversation 18/09/2016.
[294] Conversation 22/01/2017.
[295] Interview 5/02/2017.
[296] Collective conversation Vicente Salazar 4/09/2016.
[297] of 1987 – mentioned in the first empirical chapter.
[298] Interview 2/11/2016.
[299] Conversation 19/10/2016.

When the inhabitants do not have much trust in the state – that is, in the previously mentioned institutions, technology and possibility of a clean extraction, available mechanisms of control and possibilities of remediation – they do sometimes hope instead. Due to the lack of information, lack of knowledge, and lack of trust, hope is often intertwined with threat and a sense that anything could happen anytime. Bernardo, President of Puerto Quinche (inside of the ITT block where oil extraction started in March 2016), describes the territory as 'still intact' but fears air contamination, damage to the plantations and health issues (as described below). He says he 'hopes' nothing will happen but considers the presence of the *petroleras* [oil companies] to be a threat to the environment in the community: '*en cualquier momento nos puede pasar lo que nunca ha pasado* [at any point, what has never happened can happen to us]'[300]. Johnny provides a great illustration of the uncertainty surrounding the environmental impacts from the ITT oil project and the resulting confusion of the inhabitants between trust, hope and threat. A few minutes after telling me he does 'not think they are going to pollute' [because of the promise of the government, in the Constitution, to protect nature] he adds: 'They come to give jobs, but also to destroy our forest. And what are our children going to eat? There will no longer be *guatusa*[301]!'. After the collective conversation, and around a bowl of *chicha*, he concludes: 'there are very few people against the exploitation of this resource here. Because, whether today or tomorrow, it's going to be extracted. They will do it anytime anyway. (…) The best we can hope from now is that it's not too affected'[302].

Lack of power… but everyone is in favour anyway: Oil as a provider of benefits

Another common stance in the *ribera*, indeed, is that if the people say no to oil, the state oil company will come anyway. In Franco's words: 'as it's the state, if we say no it will be done

[300] Interview 16/11/2016.
[301] Another small animal from the forest that people hunt and eat.
[302] Post-*asamblea* collective conversation 4/09/2016.

all the same.'[303] I sometimes hear, in the same vein, that the oil company can extract the oil from the neighbouring communities (which have already said yes). Some of the inhabitants even think that the militaries will get involved if they oppose the oil project.

The communities are legally owner of the soil, but not the subsoil, according to the Ecuadorian law. As such, the consultation is non-binding: whatever the community's response [to the *consulta previa*] the state is able to proceed with the oil project in their territories. While people do not use those specific words, they rarely think that their decision will be respected if they say no. Edgar, a Quichua man and *socio* of Santa Rosa, happens to know that 'we are owners of the land but only of 50 centimetres underground'[304]. He nonetheless believes, contrary to most people, that if the community says no, then the company will not come. But, he adds: 'the community will never say no because everyone is in favour anyway.'[305] Subsequent interviews with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar made it clear that, beyond the lack of power to say no to oil, everyone is in favour of the oil project.

After discussing the absence of a proper consultation in the communities [which, according to different people, was conducted 'only in the village', 'only to the leaders', while people were only told about the benefits or 'consulted the other way round' – saying there would be no impact – or 'with words we cannot understand'], during the collective conversation in Vicente Salazar, I ask the *asamblea*: 'if you could have voted, would you have said yes or no?' Esteban responds: 'I would have said yes, because some jobs can come [with oil extraction]'. He explains to me, in a subsequent interview: 'Well no, oppose, oppose, I don't think it's possible, no because at least they come and create sources of jobs, and we would be wrong in opposing something which is also going to benefit the people. (…) Even if there are problems, we need

[303] Conversation 2/11/2016.
[304] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[305] Conversation 19/10/2016.

to look for the solution, how to solve and live, survive.'[306] The Salma brothers similarly maintain that their community 'is never going to oppose' oil (…), 'because (…) there are no resources for us and there are no jobs for us'[307].

Against = against the lack of benefits

I met very few people 'against' the oil project in the *ribera*. Edgar, more educated than average and a bit of an outsider in his own community, Santa Rosa, was one of them. During our first long chat, after I met him during the weekly *feria* in Tiputini, he tells me: 'Here in the communities, it's very difficult to get people to understand. (…) People are in favour. Maybe the 3% of us are against.' He continues: 'I have some friends who tell me: "*si es mas chévere con petróleo*! [it's more fun with oil extraction!]". But it's short term. They are going to stay for 20 years. And there is a lot of contamination. And the animals flee.'[308] But later in January, as he recounts his talk with a man from the consultancy of PAM who has come to 'socialize' the entrance of the oil project in his community, Santa Rosa, he explains that he asked the only thing he is interested in: whether he and his wife will get the benefits from the oil project despite the fact that they have not attended the monthly *asamblea* in a long time…

My first encounter with Javier, another more educated Quichua man and outsider in his own community, Vicente Salazar, is a similar story. During our first chat, on our way back from *Fronteras del Ecuador* in the boat of the Municipality, Javier, a self-proclaimed opponent to the oil project, explains to me: 'To say no [to oil extraction] isn't an option. Because 90% of the people is convinced that this is good.' He goes on: 'The people ask for covered pitches, but this has never lifted someone out of poverty! There is an expression which says: '*hoy PAM y mañana hambre'* (…). [today PAM[309] and tomorrow hunger]'. For him, this is due to people's

[306] Interview 26/01/2017.
[307] Interview 21/02/2017.
[308] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[309] I understood this to be a play of words with *pan*, which in Spanish means bread.

lack of education: 'The big problem here [in the region], he adds, is ignorance. My brother is going to talk to you, but with the limitations that he hasn't studied. The people do not understand, for the lack of education. They ask for very small things.' While Javier used to try and organise the people from his community, because the oil company was going to enter, *no le hicieron caso* [they did not listen to him]. This is why, he tells me, he got tired of going to the *asamblea*[310]. As my conversations with Edgar and Javier illustrate, even the few people 'against' appear at closer look not to be against the project but against the perceived lack of benefits from it. In other words, not only everyone is in favour but the few people who are 'against' could potentially be in favour if the benefits were bigger or better negotiated. 'Against' is contextual rather than against oil extraction per se – and as Juan had already explained to me: 'The one who benefits is in favour. The one who doesn't is against. *Cuando prueban, ya estan a favor* [when they taste it, they are in favour].'[311] In Johnny's words: '[as I was telling you before], we all agree. Someone who would say that oil should remain underground, like this, there isn't'[312].

2. An asymmetric package: digging into the environmental impacts from oil

People's expectations of the environmental impacts from oil often come from (unofficial sources of information such as) what they have heard about (or seen) in other oil communities, inside the ITT block (Boca Tiputini and Chiro Isla – also part of block 31), further up the river (in Samona and Chiro notably, both part of block 31), or outside the *ribera*, where they sometimes have relatives and where some of them have worked in seismic study. In general, they fear the pollution of the river (and estuaries), deforestation and disappearance of the

[310] Conversation 20/10/2016.
[311] Interview 28/08/2016.
[312] Conversation 4/09/2016. I am not sure whether Johnny refers to the Yasuní-ITT initiative here – which was almost never mentioned in my conversations with the inhabitants, most of whom simply did not know what I was talking about when I mentioned it. The initiative was probably not much 'socialized' at the local level of the Lower Napo River, and the ones who knew about it (often 'more educated' people in the communities) tended to frame it as something which was designed by people who do not understand that the local (poor) people need the benefits from oil.

animals and fishes, air pollution, damages to their *fincas* and diseases[313]. In this section I dig further into the impacts to show that while they clearly translate in terms of livelihoods in the view of the inhabitants, with expected potential consequences on their food and water supply and their health, most impacts are already present before the entrance of the oil company – which means the company only comes to further already existing impacts – while the new impacts come before (and potentially without) the benefits for the communities which are currently outside the block (and likely to be incorporated later on). Moreover, the largest impacts are expected in the long term when the inhabitants argue they could move to another part of the territory.

The river and forest are already polluted

The inhabitants expect oil to pollute the Napo River, because of potential oil spills – like the ones they recall from previous projects, which affected them. Oil extraction is also expected to pollute the small estuaries – one of the alternative sources of water (to the polluted Napo River). Valentin, a young *socio* from Yanayaku comments: 'I have a parent who only has this source of water [from the estuary] to drink. Or from the rain when it rains.'[314] The pollution of the river and estuaries is expected not only to affect people's water supply, but also their food supply. As Esteban, a *socio* from Vicente Salazar, tells me: 'it could be a problem because it pollutes the water, if you want to go and fish, you fish, but on the other hand if it's contaminated there are no more fishes.'[315] It could also result in potential diseases. According to four young *socios* from Puerto Miranda, one of the 6 communities inside the ITT block where oil extraction started in March 2016, oil extraction will affect them 'badly, because the people will get sick.

[313] It is hard to predict the objective impacts of this oil extraction project which has just started. A recent study conducted in 2016 by Clínica Ambiental (2017) reports pollution of the water, the soil and the air, as well as noise pollution near oil extraction activities in Sucumbíos (Sacha and Shushufindi mostly). They find that people who currently live closer to oil projects have more diseases, including respiratory, digestive and hormonal issues but also skin, bones, blood, nervous system, sight, kidney, infections and allergies.
[314] Conversation 17/12/2016.
[315] Interview 26/01/2017.

Infections maybe. Flu.'[316] And I am sometimes told about the 'oil spills which give cancer'[317] – in reference to the Chevron-Texaco case which some of the inhabitants have heard about and which sometimes frames their expectations of the risks for health[318]. Lopez, another *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar, mentions 'Chevron, in which case the company hadn't done the cleaning, they had spilled [oil] I don't know how many barrels, and it has come over time, look the people got cancer and the people were dying and they didn't know why, and the land was contaminated, and the water was contaminated.' For him, such impacts could come anytime, especially the diseases which are due to spills in the water or in the land.[319] In a context where the Napo River is already polluted, and [its consumption already] a health concern in the communities while the fishes are already scarce (as I show in the previous chapter), however, the oil project only comes to further pollute the water sources with expected further consequences on the scarcity of fishes and potential health issues (in the short and long run).

The inhabitants also expect the animals to disappear, in the long run, because of the noise and the deforestation. According to the Salma brothers, *mestizos* and *socios* of Vicente Salazar: 'they come with pollution, destroying the animals, they are spreading more inside, and this we do not agree upon.'[320] This would have obvious consequences on hunting for the inhabitants. After he described the potential impacts [according to him, there would be health problems, the animals would flee and fishes would die and the fauna and flora would get damaged], Jaime, a *socio* of Pando Chicta who lives in Tiputini, reminds me that 'sometimes the native people here make a living of hunting and fishing.'[321] As a result, Johnny, a *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar, fears for food provision in the future[322]. In a context where the animals and

[316] Interview 2/09/2016.
[317] Interview Salma brothers, *mestizos* and *socios* of Vicente Salazar, 27/01/2017.
[318] The same recent study by Clínica Ambiental (2017) finds that there are more cases of cancer in areas where Texaco used to operate.
[319] Interview 1/02/2017.
[320] Interview 27/01/2017.
[321] Interview 25/01/2017.
[322] Post-*asamblea* collective conversation 4/09/2016.

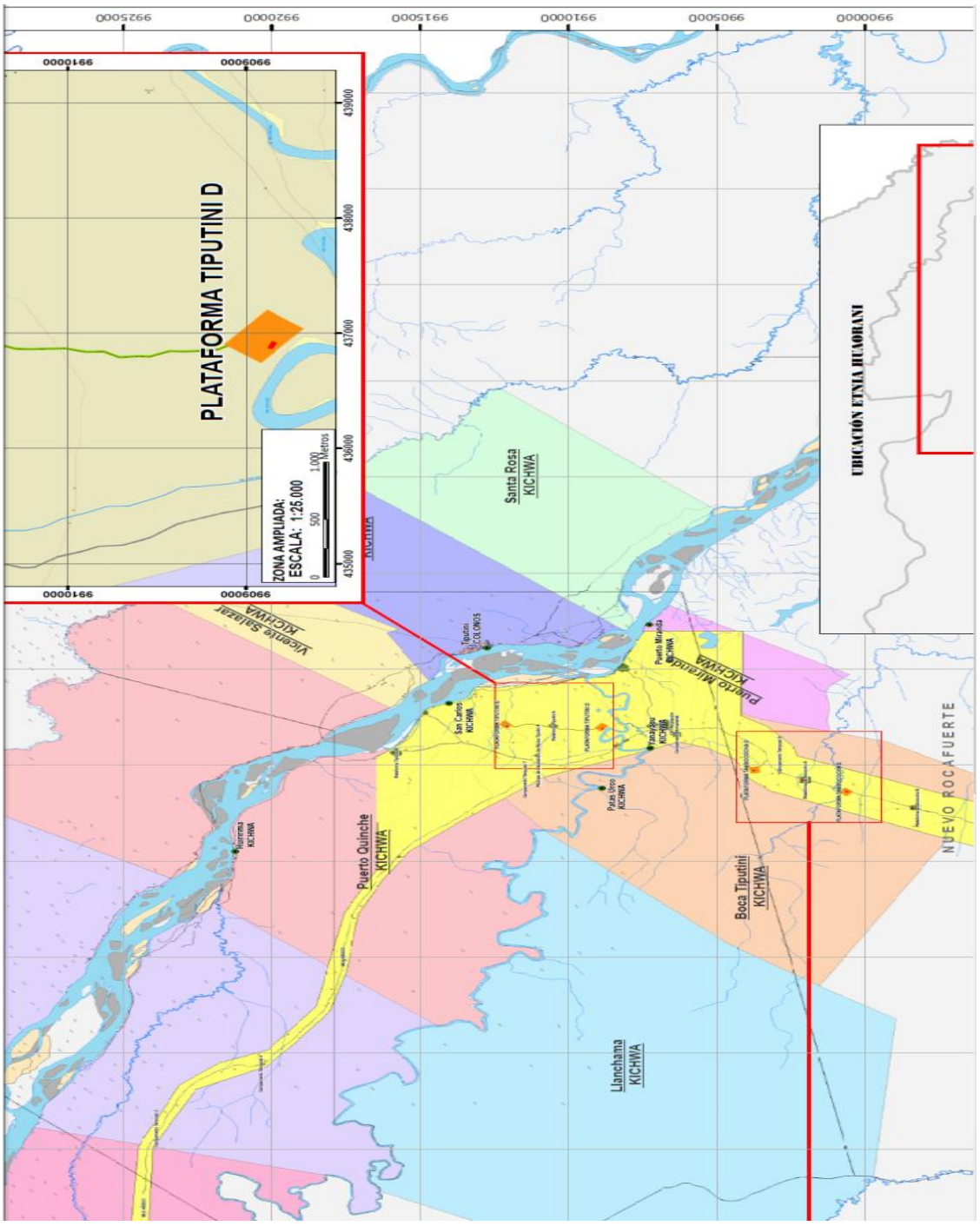
fishes are already increasingly scarce while hunting and fishing are limited by the controls from the state, however, oil extraction only comes to further the impacts on the forest and their consequences on people's food supply and livelihoods. In fact, people sometimes emphasised that the environment was already destroyed anyway. As a *socio* tells me during the *minga* in Pando Chicta: 'here there is nothing left'[323]. The existing impact were partly caused by past oil extraction projects further up the river and oil exploration of the ITT area, as I explain in the previous chapter. In that vein, the owner of the community shop of Llanchama, a 'bastion of resistance' to PAM in 2014 which has now turned in favour of the entrance of the company, tells me: '*Ya estamos jodidos* [We are already screwed]. *Ya tenemos la pata adentro* [We already have a foot inside]. They've been here since 1968. Western, CGG[324]. *Habia que decir que no* [we should have said no] from the beginning.'[325]

Impacts 'before' (and potentially without) the benefits

I slowly realise, while talking to the inhabitants of the communities outside of but next to the ITT block [Vicente Salazar, Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta, where the oil company is coming to *socializar* the entrance of a new seismic study in their communities in January 2017], that not only they expect the river and forest to be further affected if the oil company and project enter their community, but that they would be affected by those potential impacts all the same if oil does not come to their specific territory. Indeed, most impacts are not tied to the ITT 'block' but are expected to affect all the communities in and around it – who share the same river and forest in particular – as is clearly visible in the map of communities created by PAM (see figure 38 below).

[323] Collective conversation 3/09/2016.
[324] *Compagnie Générale de Géophysique.*
[325] Conversation 29/01/2017.

Figure 38: 'Mapa de Comunidades y Etnias'[326] (map of communities and ethnic groups)



Source: Petroamazonas 2016

[326] This map is a zoomed version of figure 12 in the methods chapter. It shows the communities of Puerto Miranda (yellow), Puerto Quinche (pink) and Boca Tiputini (orange) 'inside' the ITT block, Santa Rosa (green), Pando Chicta (violet) and Vicente Salazar (beige), outside the ITT block and Llanchama (green), outside the ITT block but inside neighbouring block 31. All 7 communities (including the four communities outside the ITT block) are included in the new seismic study in blocks ITT and 31 which was 'socialized' in 2017.

The [current] pollution of the river, in particular, is not only affecting the communities inside the oil block but the communities of Vicente Salazar, Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta, all outside but next to the ITT block, who use the same Napo River as a source of water, food (fishes) and all the purposes described in the previous empirical chapter.

In Santa Rosa, three men tell me, after the *asamblea*: 'There is no oil extraction here. But if we talk about contamination, yes, we are affected. The firm says we are not contaminated, but through the Napo River we are.'[327] In fact, the [further] pollution of the [already polluted] Napo River is not only a long-term prospect: it can already be observed by the inhabitants, due to the increased amount of boats in the Napo River resulting from the oil activities in the ITT block – as emphasised by Francis during the collective conversation in Vicente Salazar[328].

Thus the communities outside the block not only expect the river to be further polluted if oil enters their specific territory: instead, the pollution of the shared Napo River from the current ITT oil project will affect them all the same if they remain outside the ITT block [with the same consequences on their health and livelihoods] and such pollution is actually already observable according to the inhabitants.

The same goes for the impacts on the forest and animals which are not only expected to be further 'destroyed' (or disappear further) if oil enters their specific territory: there is also a sense that the forest is going to be destroyed (with expected consequences on the scarcity of animals) all the same in the long term in the communities outside, but next to, the ITT block. Again, the impacts on the forest and animals are not limited to one particular territory, and the ITT oil project is expected to affect the forest in Vicente Salazar, Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta, all outside but next to the ITT block, whether or not oil enters their respective territory. And

[327] Collective conversation 11/09/2016.
[328] 4/09/2016.

some people in Santa Rosa and Vicente Salazar insist that the animals are fleeing already because of the noise from the seismic explosions in the ITT block[329].

All in all, the oil project not only comes to further pollute the [already polluted Napo] River (with expected consequences on food and health) and further destroy the [already damaged] forest in the long run in the communities inside the oil block, but the same consequences are expected for the communities outside but next to the ITT block which share the same river and forest, while some of the impacts can actually already be observed by the inhabitants of those communities, such as the pollution of the river and the increased scarcity of animals, after a few months of oil activities. In other words, oil not only comes to weaken the already weakened economy described in the previous chapter: it does so both in the communities inside the oil block and the ones outside, but next to it.

But while the communities currently outside of, but next to the ITT block are expecting the same impacts from the current (ITT) oil extraction project on the river and forest as the communities inside the block – with the same long-term expected consequences on health and livelihoods – they are not benefitting from the jobs, money (*indemnización*) and social compensation the oil project comes with in the 'affected' communities – as many people emphasise in Vicente Salazar, Pando Chicta and Santa Rosa, all outside but next to the block and 'affected' through the river and forest. In that vein, Lopez, a *mestizo* man and *socio* of Vicente Salazar, comments: 'this environmental impact is harming all of us in the canton right now (…), and why don't we have the same right for the people to work? Why don't they let us work?'[330] As a result, Eloy, another *mestizo* man and *socio* of the same community, [who would like to ask the oil company for jobs, education, health, an indoor pitch and better means of transportation,] keeps repeating that '*solo nos vienen a contaminar* [they only come to

[329] Conversation Edgar 19/10/2016.
[330] Interview 1/02/2017.

pollute us]'[331]. Adriana, who considers that 'oil extraction [too] could give us some support with education' also complains that 'at the moment they are not here. They are only in Puerto Quinche, Puerto Miranda, and Boca Tiputini. They have not come here.'[332]

Indeed, as explained in the history chapter, the benefits from oil are only given to the six communities 'inside' the ITT block – which territories are directly crossed by the oil facilities. Thus, from the point of view of the communities next to the oil block, the expected impacts from oil are not only 'already here', but they come 'before' (and potentially without) the benefits. This effectively explains why the entrance of the oil company in one particular community is framed as a provider of benefits solely, and why the inhabitants not only accept the entrance of the company in their territory [absence of opposition] without apparent debate, but often even complain about its absence [and the lack of benefits] before it comes. This also explains Achacaspi's observation that while the inhabitants of the *ribera* used to resist the entrance of the oil companies, resistance has become more and more passive among the Quichua people whose strategies have shifted towards negotiations around the benefits: 'They ask a little bit, and they don't want to lose that little bit. This is what they fight for (…) Resistance is weaker and weaker.' He tells me. 'But, he concludes, they are all in favour'[333]

Impacts on the finca: possibilities of remediation and moving in the long term

When a community enters the oil project, its inhabitants not only expect further impacts on their water sources and forest but impacts on the land and *finca*. The potential impacts on the land are both new – in the sense that the cultivations are healthy, according to the inhabitants – and more local in that contrary to the potential impacts on the river and forest, they are only expected to affect the communities inside the oil block (and directly crossed by the oil facilities).

[331] Conversation 18/09/2016.
[332] Conversation during *asamblea* 11/09/2016.
[333] Interview 24/02/2017.

Damage to the *fincas* could translate into lack of food in the future, and the inhabitants are worried about impacts on the yucca and plantain in particular. According to Adriana, a *socia* of Santa Rosa: 'they take the oil from here and then they leave, and they leave us without a thing, the yucca and the plantain do not grow anymore.'[334] They are sometimes concerned, as a result, about food provision in the future, but also diseases. In the communities inside the ITT block, where oil started being extracted in March 2016, Antonio, a *socio* and teacher in Boca Tiputini, thinks that 'everything will be different, the food will be different for instance. It will be worse than today. (…) They will continue cultivating the land but it will no longer give a good product.'[335] And Bernardo, President of Puerto Quinche, also fears that oil could 'dry our *sembrillos* [plantations]' and that more diseases would come as a result.[336]

In Puerto Quinche and Puerto Miranda, some people told me they could observe an impact on the *finca* already. I heard, from a woman in Puerto Quinche, that 'the yucca, plantain, do not grow well'[337]. The other women confirmed. Similarly, an elderly woman from Puerto Miranda maintained that the yucca from her *finca* was affected: '[Sure] it's still yucca, she said, but it's too hard to cook.'[338] As I was staying in Belén's house, in Puerto Quinche, she insisted that she had not only heard about the impacts from other places but that '*se vive la contaminación* [the pollution is something you experience]'. 'The yucca doesn't grow as well [as usual], the plantain either. And above all, the animals flee. There used to be very large birds, but you can no longer see them.' She thought this was due to oil[339].

Such impacts on the land and *finca* are often described as resulting from the pollution of the soil, which could come from spills on the land – as people have heard from or observed in other

[334] Conversation 7/12/2016.
[335] Interview 25/11/2016.
[336] Interview Bernardo 16/11/2016.
[337] *Taller*, 10/11/2016.
[338] Interview Carmelisa, 17/01/2017.
[339] Conversations 10-12/11/2016.

communities. While some people believe there could be reforestation, they often consider the expected damage to the *finca* to be irreversible. For Edgar, who worked for some years for French oil exploration company CGG, some impacts can be remediated while others cannot: 'There are some impacts that you can repair, like *la tala de bosque* [logging of wood]. It can be reforested, the oil companies do it.' 'But, on the other hand, he fears, there will be contamination. Maybe there won't be as many fruits as today.'[340] Franco does not even think the territory can be reforested. He tells me: 'they come to destroy our forest, and you know what happens when they damage, even though they do reforestation, it's never the same as the forest was' He adds that he has 'seen that in other communities (…) In Chiro Isla and in Samona[341]. During another *minga* in Vicente Salazar, Melo, a *mestizo* and *socio* of the community, tells me: 'It's a problem, because the plantain and the yucca don't grow. They get dry.' – before he adds: 'But we can go and live somewhere else. Further inside, around the Tiputini River, there is much land.'[342] When discussing the impacts on the forest and *finca* in the long term, indeed, there was a sense that the territory is so large that people can move if the forest and *fincas* get damaged. In that vein, Juan considers that 'It's not a problem if the environment is destroyed. There is so much territory! Only the eldest know, because it has cost them much sacrifice. The young people haven't sacrificed anything. So they don't care.' He adds, referring to the ITT project: 'For 50 years it's good. Because there's lots of territory. After that, it's bad.' 'They live in the present, they are *facilistas*[343], he concludes. They would exchange their own custom for something easy.'[344]

It seemed, in fact, that the subsistence economy and work of the land are not necessarily tied to the particular piece of land where the territory is situated – at least in the view of some of

[340] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[341] Conversation 2/11/2016.
[342] Conversation 18/09/2016.
[343] Here Juan means exactly what he says in the next sentence. Could translate as superficial more generally.
[344] Interview 28/08/2016.

the inhabitants[345]. As such, this very subsistence economy could easily be recreated elsewhere in the forest. In fact, everyone seemed to agree on the fact that 'the *indígena* never abandons his culture' – as Johnny told me a few times, referring to agriculture and in response to my recurrent question whether they would continue cultivating the land in an oil extraction context. In the words of Ulises and Lorenzo, two young Quichua men (and brothers) from Puerto Miranda: 'Until death we'll continue cultivating the land'[346]. More generally, the idea that oil is coming to destroy the place coexists in the communities with a sense that the forest will always remain – which is illustrative of its perceived abundance.

Johnny, after he explained that his family had come to visit him and could now understand why he had decided to stay here, tells me: 'I feel proud: so much vegetation, so many animals. Sharing, and talking. In France, you don't know that. You arrive in Ecuador and it's already very different. And then you take a bus, and a boat, and you arrive here: it's a paradise, no?' He felt like 'this will always remain a paradise, however much oil [extraction] comes here.'[347]

In fact, while some of the current impacts from the ITT oil project are already observable in the ITT area [inside and around the oil block], such as the boats which pollute the river and the noise which scares the animals, the biggest impacts and consequences on people's livelihoods, [whether they are new or going to affect further an already affected environment,] are expected in the long term [for the communities inside the block]. This includes not only the expected damage to the *fincas* but the risk of spills on the river and land, destruction of the forest, lack of food and health problems. As such, the possibility of moving to another part of the territory,

[345] This ability to move might be put in parallel with the story of immigration in the region and the fact that most of the Quichua inhabitants are descendent of settlers who arrived less than 100 years ago (as explained in the history chapter). The strong presence of *mestizos* in Vicente Salazar might have reinforced this 'ability' even further. It might also be put in parallel with the abundance of the Amazon and the size of territories: one of the main differences between the lowland and highland indigenous people of Ecuador according to Eduardo Pichilingue, a Peruvian anthropologist who lives in Ecuador and whom I interviewed in August 2016, is that there is no notion of scarcity in the Amazon which is large and abundant.
[346] Interview 2/09/2016.
[347] Collective conversation Vicente Salazar 4/09/2016.

and potentially along another river, as Melo suggests, would arguably not only 'solve' the expected long-term impacts of the ITT oil project on the land, but on the forest and river [all of which are often seen as irreversible by the inhabitants] – thus also hypothetically solving the pre-existing ecological issues described in the first empirical chapter, such as the pollution of the river and scarcity of fishes and animals which already exist before the entrance of the oil company. In the meantime, the inhabitants argue they can take advantage of the benefits – money, jobs, and the social compensation which comes instantly (or in the short term) with oil extraction. When I ask Ulises and Lorenzo, the two young brothers from Puerto Miranda, whether life will be better with oil, they tell me: 'With time, I imagine no. Because the oil runs out and it remains the same as now.' I ask, then, what they are going to do. 'Now, if there are jobs, take advantage of the jobs' they respond. And later 'look for another place to live.'[348]

While most of the impacts, whether they are already present or not, are expected to affect the inhabitants in the future mostly, the benefits, jobs and money in particular, come instantly with the oil project in a context where, as I describe in the first empirical chapter, those benefits are seen as lacking and necessary. Such asymmetry (in time) is, for Carlito, a young *socio* from Vicente Salazar, another reason why people accept oil. He tells me: 'the adults are happy because of the sources of jobs.' Carlito [has no job and] would like to work for the company, too: 'but not in my territory', he insists. 'And the jobs are short term'[349], he goes on. In addition to the adults' lack of understanding of the impacts, he considers people's acceptance of oil to be due to the fact that 'we are the ones who will be harmed, when the company leaves.'[350]

As a matter of fact, following the announcement of the oil company during the January *minga* in Vicente Salazar, intra-community discussions revolve around the question of what people

[348] Interview 2/09/2016.
[349] It should be noted already that short term jobs are usually exactly what the inhabitants aspire to, as I will develop in the fourth empirical chapter.
[350] Conversation 22/01/2017.

should ask as part of the social compensation. And the answer is anything but straightforward. I now turn to this question and show that the social compensation, which translates into drinking water provision in almost all the communities of the ITT block, has the potential not only to 'compensate' for the impacts on the river from the ITT oil project, but for a long-standing ecological and health concern in the communities – thereby reinforcing the asymmetry of the 'oil package' thus the inevitability of acceptance, while also setting the stage for the biggest impacts from oil which are indirect and long term and come from the benefits from oil – as I explore in the next two chapters of the thesis.

Figure 39: Oil facilities (gas flaring[351]) along the Napo River (near Pompeya)



Source: the author

[351] There are currently 447 gas flares in the Amazon (Paz Cardona 2021). They are responsible for air contamination, pollution of the rainwater, and health impacts on the local populations living near them (see Clínica Ambiental 2017). The picture was taken near Pompeya, in the Upper part of the river, on my way from Coca to Tiputini, from the boat. Gas flaring, however, is not a topic in the lower part of the Napo River where there is no such infrastructure at the moment.

3. From oil extraction to drinking water: benefits which 'compensate' for the impacts

The social compensation: what to ask? [heterogeneity and cultural considerations]

While some *mestizos* and 'more educated' people have strong opinions about what the community should ask – benefits for the future, such as basic services, and benefits in health and education – they are struggling to organise their community. They complain, in particular, that most *socios* only want short-term benefits because they do not think about the future. During the collective conversation, Johnny tells me: 'I had personally written some three pages to say what we should ask: first, a hospital, second, a university (so that the young people could work for the very company too), and third, a network of roads. Also, water and electricity. This is the *buen vivir!'* he goes on: 'But only some 10 of us asked for this. So, how are they going to give us if they think that only 20% of us need it? (…)'. He concludes: 'The issue is that 80% of the people here, we do not think about the future. So, we asked for very punctual things, such as jobs. (…) From today to tomorrow, oil will be gone. We need to think about it'[352]. Gaspar, who personally thinks the community should ask for a hospital and a university 'for our people to be able to *salir adelante*', similarly tells me: 'I can propose that, but I need to see what the *asamblea* says. I cannot decide on my own. The issue of the Quichua people here is that they ask things for the *ahora* [now]. They do not think about their children, their grandchildren. They ask for boats, for instance. But there won't be [anything] for the future.'[353]

In that vein, they often criticise the inhabitants of Boca Tiputini, part of the ITT oil block, for having spent all the money from the *indemnización* [some 500,000 dollars for the community and some 6000 dollars per family[354]] in short term benefits – such as canoes, motors, things for the house (or even new houses) and alcohol (beer) to share with their friends. Eloy, a *mestizo*, *socio* of Vicente Salazar, tells me: 'In Boca Tiputini, they bought motors, drinks, and that's it.

[352] Post-*asamblea* collective conversation, 4/09/2016.
[353] Conversation 31/01/2017.
[354] See appendix II for official documents.

[Pointing to a woman]: What happens to that woman if her motor breaks? She doesn't have money to repair it. *Y asi se acabo* [And that's the end of the story].' He adds: 'I want to be good but above all, I want my children and grandchildren to be good. In 100 years.'[355] During another conversation in Tiputini, he goes on: 'We are not like the ones in front [referring to the inhabitants of Boca Tiputini, which community is situated on the other bank of the Napo River, in front of Tiputini], who ask for very short term and individual things. What we want is the common good. (…) . We do not want benefits for 2, 5 or 20 years. We do not want 20,000 or 100,000 dollars. We want something long term. A project. In education and health. And a hospital. I want to secure education for my children, my grandchildren, and the children of my grandchildren. We all want that, in the community.'[356]

I heard the same complaints, over and again, from the *mestizos* and oil workers, regarding the [supposed] lack of consideration for the future of the Quichua inhabitants, and the fact that they are mostly interested in the jobs and money which come with oil. In Emilio's view, an anthropologist (and priest) working for PAM: 'They think that the way to progress is to work for an oil firm, for some 500 dollars a month. But how do you grow as a person doing that?'[357] He considers, instead, that 'For all of them to have basic services' is one of the 'projects which would actually have an impact (…). Drinking water, something for the garbage, etc. (…) Large cities benefitted, why don't they benefit here?' 'We propose them these kinds of things, he goes on. But they aren't interested. There is no environmental consciousness here. Have you seen all the dump plastic?' In his view – which is illustrative of a widespread narrative in the *ribera* among the *mestizos* and regarding the Quichua inhabitants: '(…) what the indigenous people want is not ecology, but progress. They want Westernisation.' According to Joseph, a *mestizo* man living in Nuevo Rocafuerte, 'They are happy with that income, of 500 [dollars].

[355] Conversation 18/09/2016.
[356] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[357] Interview 8/11/2016.

Here 500 is quite a lot. They live well, they can drink. But they don't invest in education. It's not that they don't like the children, no, only that they don't think that way.'[358]

What is framed as lack of consciousness by Emilio is 'cultural' for Juan. 'With such money, he tells me one day, I would personally invest in a productive plant, which would require capital. The issue is that they live in the present. This is why they don't ask for productive things.' He goes on: 'it's part of their culture. This is why I don't get into the matters of how money should be used. Never. I get into everything, except that. Because I don't want to interfere with their culture, with their decisions. I tell them one thing: split the money equally. That's all.'[359]

Some weeks before the *socialización* of the new seismic study in Vicente Salazar, he asks me: 'Julie, advise me, what should they ask for the compensation in Vicente Salazar?'. 'I don't know', I respond. 'But after so much time here?' 'You've been here for longer', I say. Juan goes on: 'Yes, I know what I want to ask, but I want your opinion. What happens is that whatever they ask, it's going to transform their culture, isn't it?'[360] In the specific context of the negotiations with PAM, Juan's recurrent question (how to bring development to the communities without changing them?) had become: how to benefit from the social compensation without changing the culture? The answer, again, was nothing but straightforward, and the question of cultural change resulting from the social compensation is investigated in the next chapters, as the communities are provided with the drinking water.

Demands in the ITT block

In the ITT block, and against this common narrative, four of the six communities asked for drinking water as part of the social compensation and all of them asked for some kind of 'basic services' (water, electricity or sewage system) – in addition to benefits in the domain of

[358] Conversation 15/11/2016.
[359] Conversation 23/10/2016.
[360] Conversation 24/01/2017.

education, projects and training, fluvial transportation, infrastructure and technology[361]. Although decisions are made on the basis of consensus in the communities, the vast majority of the inhabitants does not actively participate in the collective decisions, which in practice are mostly influenced by the leaders of the communities who, often more educated than average, tend to value drinking water and benefits in the domains of education, health and basic services and are usually trusted by the rest of the community. Moreover, and importantly, decisions regarding the social compensation are not made by the communities alone. The Mayor, who is in charge of providing the communities with all the basic services [as a competency and legal responsibility of the Municipality] and often fails to do so, commonly advises the communities to ask for drinking water (but also electricity, and a hospital in Tiputini) to the oil company, as part of the social compensation – as Juan observed in various negotiations with PAM, and as the Mayor himself told me during a breakfast in Tiputini[362]. In some communities, such as Puerto Quinche, the inhabitants asked for drinking water after the Mayor's intervention in the *asamblea*. In Juan's words: 'They want to kill two birds with one stone: they want to propose works that they are supposed to do, they take the money from the compensation and they do it. This way, the work is done and they haven't put a cent.'[363] When I asked Felix, the Mayor, what the communities should ask, he answered indeed: 'First the basic services. Having drinking water, electrification, and sanitation facilities.'[364]

The oil workers, who often consider, like Emilio, that the inhabitants need the 'basic services', are also aware that they are seen as responsible for providing such services, in exchange for oil extraction. Santiago, an agro-engineer working for PAM [in DRC], explains to me: 'Well, sometimes they ask for other things, such as zinc roofs; or mattresses. But water is the base,

[361] See Appendix I for the details [basic services highlighted].
[362] 25/01/2017.
[363] Conversation 30/10/2016.
[364] Conversation 25/01/2017.

isn't it?'[365] He adds: 'it's convenient for the Municipality that we're doing what is their competence. And we also want the communities to be well. So we do it'. And he concludes: 'A Municipality will never do many works when an oil firm is around. And if we don't do them, they will say: "they are taking oil out and there is not even light or drinking water!" But the Municipality, with this money that they are not spending, they should do something else! And they don't.'[366] In Boca Tiputini, indeed, I was told that the Mayor was no longer supporting the inhabitants: 'because one goes and *solicita* [demands] that, for instance, my children graduated, *señor alcalde* [Sir Mayor] please help me with a scholarship, no, now what does he say? "the company is here", this is what he the current Mayor [who is now] say'.[367]

In fact, as Achacaspi, the capuchin priest, emphasises: 'they get electricity not through the Municipality but through the oil company. Same for the piped water.' And Francis, who works in the health centre in Tiputini, compliments: 'Even the health centre here, it was not built by the Municipality. PAM made it, through a *convenio*[368] with the Municipality. And PAM makes donations of medicines and *combustible* [petrol] for the emergencies.'[369] According to Emilio: 'They think that Santa Claus is coming. They think everything is going to be easy. And we also represent the state, which has been absent here.'[370]

Zoom on drinking water

When I ask the inhabitants why they have asked for drinking water, in Puerto Quinche in particular, Bernardo, the President, tells me: 'Well, some people there have lived for years and there is no hope that someday we will change and have the basic services... The community of

[365] Conversation 18/12/2016.
[366] Conversation 18/12/2016.
[367] Interview two brothers in Boca Tipuitni 16/12/2016.
[368] A *convenio* in this context is an agreement between the company and the local state whereby both parties will finance the infrastructure, which will be built by the company and later managed by the Municipality. Can translate as convention or agreement.
[369] Collective conversation 4/09/2016.
[370] Interview Emilio 8/11/2016.

Puerto Quinche has raised this. Because it's the fundamental base: health comes from the water.'[371] And Tupac, an ex-President of the community, proudly says to me: 'The drinking water was our idea.' He adds: 'Here, the people in the *ribera* don't have the knowledge to create a development. This is why the other communities haven't asked for drinking water.'[372] For Belén, a young Quichua woman: '(…) It's logical, because the firm will pollute the river. I don't know why it's only here. Someone *se puso pilas* [got smart] and asked for water.'[373] Finally Eloy, a *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar, makes the same reasoning, but from the point of view of a community outside the oil block: 'Here, we are lacking drinking water. They will pollute us, and they don't give us drinking water.'[374]

In the case of the pollution of the river, such direct link between the benefits and the impacts effectively reinforces the idea that oil comes with the impacts before the benefits and that the entrance of the company is reframed as a provider of benefits. And the fact that the benefits can compensate for the impacts only reinforces further the asymmetry of the dilemma. In that vein, there was sometimes a sense that oil could come and pollute the river as long as it gave the people drinking water. In fact, the two young brothers I discussed with in Puerto Miranda, who considered oil was coming with diseases to the communities, made this explicit reasoning regarding pollution, health and hospitals: 'The bad part is the pollution, they tell me. The pollution of the river, estuaries, and also the environment. On the other, it's good because oil also gives health to the people. (…) For instance, with the money from oil, you can build health centres. And you can help the people with medicine.' They go on: 'If they pollute and if the people start getting sick, and if there's no money, the people will die, let's say. But with the money you can cure diseases. With money you can cure. You can buy medicine. [Move]

[371] 16/11/2016.
[372] Conversation 18/12/2016.
[373] Conversation 10/11/2016.
[374] Conversation 18/09/2016.

someone to another place.'[375] Similarly, during the *minga* in Pando Chicta, someone tells me it is fine to have contamination 'but they have to leave us a good hospital, and medicines.'[376]

4. Summary and discussion: from oil as a dilemma to the inevitability of acceptance

Summary

No one is against the entrance of the oil company, in the communities of the *ribera*. In fact, the impacts from oil are relatively absent from people's collective decisions about oil extraction, and the oil project is almost always reframed as a provider of benefits. That was the initial puzzle of this chapter, before it described the process of acceptance of the oil company by the community of Vicente Salazar and investigated the reasons why people collectively accept oil in spite of its perceived and expected environmental impacts – with expected consequences on people's livelihoods – and beyond the lack of power to actually say no.

The chapter shows that while the inhabitants expect impacts on the forest, river and land (*finca*) mostly, which they sometimes estimate would have large consequences on their livelihoods – in particular, lack of water and food (cultivations, fishes and meat) and the associated health problems, most of those impacts are already experienced by the communities of the *ribera* before the entrance of the oil project [as was made explicit in chapter 4 already] – meaning oil extraction only comes to weaken an already weakened subsistence economy. This does not only happen to the communities inside the oil block, though, and oil also comes to further existing impacts on the river [and forest and their consequences on people's health and livelihoods] in the communities outside the oil block too: because oil enters little by little in the river, most of the impacts from the current oil project (whether expected or already observable) come before (and potentially without) the benefits, from the point of view of the communities outside, but next to, the oil block, in a context where the subsistence economy

[375] Interview 2/09/2016.
[376] Collective conversations 3/09/2016.

[forest and river in particular] is already affected and while the benefits from oil (jobs and money especially) are considered as lacking and necessary in the communities prior to the entrance of the oil company. For those communities, which are experiencing the impacts of the ITT oil project (on the river and forest) without benefitting from the money, jobs and social compensation it comes with, the oil project is logically reframed as a provider of benefits. This arguably goes a long way in explaining acceptance already.

When a community enters the oil project, its inhabitants not only expect further impacts on the river and forest, but new impacts on the land and *finca*, which could translate into lack of food in the future. The impact on the *finca*, however, is long term, and in the long term the inhabitants argue they could move to another part of the territory and recreate their subsistence economy somewhere else – because, ultimately, the *indígena* never abandons his culture (the work of the *finca* in particular). In fact, since the largest impacts and consequences on people's livelihoods are expected in the long term for the communities inside the block, the possibility of moving to another part of the territory, and potentially along another river, would arguably not only 'solve' the expected long-term impacts of the ITT oil project on the land, but on the forest and river – thus also solving the pre-existing ecological issues described in the first empirical chapter (and first section of this chapter), such as the pollution of the river and scarcity of fishes and animals which already exist before the entrance of the oil company. In the meantime, the inhabitants can take advantage of the benefits – money, jobs, and the social compensation – which come instantly (in the short term) with oil extraction. This second asymmetry in time between the impacts and the benefits effectively reinforces the inevitability of acceptance by the communities of the *ribera*.

When the oil firm enters, discussions revolve around what to ask as part of the social compensation, and in almost all the communities of the ITT block, such negotiations have resulted in the provision of drinking water for the inhabitants. Drinking water not only comes

as a direct 'compensation' for the pollution of the river due to the ITT oil project but as a response to the pollution of the river which exists prior to the entrance of the oil company in the ITT block, partly comes from past oil extraction projects further up the river and exploration in the ITT area and remains mostly unaddressed before the entrance of the company in the *ribera*, as I showed in the previous chapter. Thus, through the provision of drinking water to the communities, not only the oil project has the potential to 'compensate' for the consequences of its own impacts on people's livelihoods and health, but it also comes with a solution for a long-standing ecological and health concern in the communities. The fact that some of the benefits (drinking water in this case) come with solutions for some of the impacts which are expected from the current oil project (further pollution of the river) but also for impacts which are already here (already-existing pollution of the river) effectively reinforces, once again, the asymmetry between the impacts and the benefits from oil, thus the inevitability of acceptance.

All in all, while most of the environmental impacts are given (as they come before – or without – the benefits), and while the consequences of most further impacts on people's livelihoods, whether they are already here or new (*finca*, but also river and forest), could be 'solved' in the long term by moving to another part of the territory, the consequences of the pollution of the river on people's livelihoods and health in the shorter term could find a solution in the social compensation – which also has the potential to compensate for pre-existing impacts on the river, through the provision of drinking water in particular.

Discussion

Against my initial understanding of oil decisions as a dilemma (MCA perspective displayed in theory chapter), the asymmetry between the impacts and the benefits from oil goes a long way in explaining the acceptance of the ITT oil project by the Quichua communities of the *ribera*. In other words, if oil is a dilemma (impacts and benefits versus no impacts and no benefits) then it is a rather asymmetric one where the 'impacts', on the one hand, are already here (see

chapter 4), come before (and potentially without) the benefits, and the largest ones come in the long term when the people could move to another part of the territory, while the 'benefits', on the other hand, are seen as lacking and necessary (see chapter 4) and come in the short term while some of them can even compensate not only for the impacts expected with the oil project but for long standing ecological and health problems in the communities. Such asymmetry becomes apparent as one investigates oil decisions as a dynamic process. It is fourfold: although oil is expected to affect the land, river and forest, with expected consequences on people's livelihoods and health, 1) most impacts are already here (the river is already polluted and the animals already scarce) before the entrance of the company while the benefits are considered as lacking and necessary (in particular given the changing needs and conception of poverty discussed in the first empirical chapter), 2) because oil enters little by little in the *ribera*, some of the new impacts from the ITT oil project (such as further pollution of the river and further disappearance of the animals) come before (and potentially without) the benefits from the point of view of the communities outside but next to the block and incorporated to the oil project later on (such as Vicente Salazar but also Santa Rosa and Pando Chicta), 3) the biggest impacts from the current ITT oil project (including the risk of spills on the river and land, destruction of the forest, damages to the *finca*, lack of food and health problems) are expected in the long term, when the people argue they could move to another part of the territory – while in the meantime they can enjoy the benefits from the oil project, jobs and money in particular, which come instantly in the short term (to the Quichua inhabitants who arguably live in the present) and, finally, 4) some of the benefits (from the social compensation) have the potential to provide solutions for the consequences of some of the impacts on people's livelihoods (in the short term) and health, but also of existing impacts which have resulted from previous oil extraction projects, on the river notably, through the provision of drinking water in particular.

It follows that the choice of oil in the communities of the Lower Napo River is not the mere reflection (or translation) of a hierarchy of values and needs which would favour socio-economic development over ecological and cultural needs and values. Instead, it includes contextual variables related to the timeframe of the impacts and benefits, the state of the communities and the context of scarcity described in the previous chapter, as well as the interdependences between the impacts and the benefits. Such interindependence will be furthered in the next chapters, as I show how (and why) the 'benefits' from oil will become the trigger of the biggest ecological and cultural 'impacts' on territories and peoples, indirectly and in the long term. In that regard, the chapter also illustrated how oil extraction leads to drinking water as the next logical step in the process of change in the communities, in an oil development context – thus setting the stage for the next empirical chapters where I travel to the communities of the ITT and to Samona, further up the river and ahead in the process of oil extraction (during and after oil) and investigate the next stages of such process through basic service provision, commodification, wage labour, the urbanisation of the *ribera*, the changing values of its inhabitants and the weakening of an already weakened subsistence economy.

The bigger picture

Considering the conclusions from the previous chapter, where I show that the use of nature as a source of livelihood is made increasingly difficult in practice, resulting in decreased subsistence activities being replaced with increased dependence on money to fulfil people's needs (and the state to provide with such money), and considering that such difficulties partly come from past extraction and exploration projects, further up the river and in the ITT area respectively, it becomes clear that oil extraction is both the source of scarcity in nature and a response to such scarcity (through the social compensation but also through the money and jobs that are made increasingly necessary as a result of increased scarcity in nature and in the context of changing livelihoods, as I suggest in the previous chapter). Indeed, the company

comes with responses to a newly created scarcity while furthering the ecological issues of the place and while providing, at the same time, (short term) solutions to some of the impacts, through the social compensation – solutions which are then going to be the trigger of the biggest changes as they affect further people's relationship with nature as a source of livelihoods and, in the longer term, their very ecological values. In other words and from a different perspective, changing livelihoods for which nature is increasingly insufficient (partly as a result of past oil projects) result in new needs (for money and jobs) which the oil company will come and meet while disrupting further the already disrupted subsistence economy (and people's relationship with nature as a source of livelihood) with direct environmental impact, some of which will be 'compensated' by the social compensation (in that case drinking water) – at the costs of furthering the process of ecological change at play in the communities in subsequent years, through indirect and long term impacts.

It will result that while oil comes with benefits (which are lacking and necessary) and impacts (which are already here), it also comes with solutions for the old (already existing) and new impacts, and such 'solutions' will eventually be the trigger of the largest impacts. In that vein, the next empirical chapters will come to challenge some of the predictions made by the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar in this chapter. First, the provision of drinking water will be the trigger of the biggest struggles and impacts, as it comes with a monthly payment to the Municipality which will, in turn, make money and jobs in the oil company even more necessary, resulting in less time for the *finca* and less interest in agriculture and traditional subsistence activities in general – while in some communities the provision of basic services will be conditional on people gathering in the centre of the community [as a village], creating a disconnection in space from the *finca*. The idea that the *indígena* never abandons the land will thus be challenged, as people's values (of the *finca* and agriculture in particular) change with money (as observed by the inhabitants of the lower part of the river among the young and in

the communities further up the river). Moreover, the idea of moving to another part of the territory will be similarly challenged as it is unable to meet people's new needs (for money in particular). This is one of the reasons why some of the inhabitants will suggest, instead, that the young should move to the city to find a job as the oil company leaves the *ribera*.

Chapter 6. 'They want to change us by charging us': paying for the water and the water conflict in Samona (third empirical chapter)

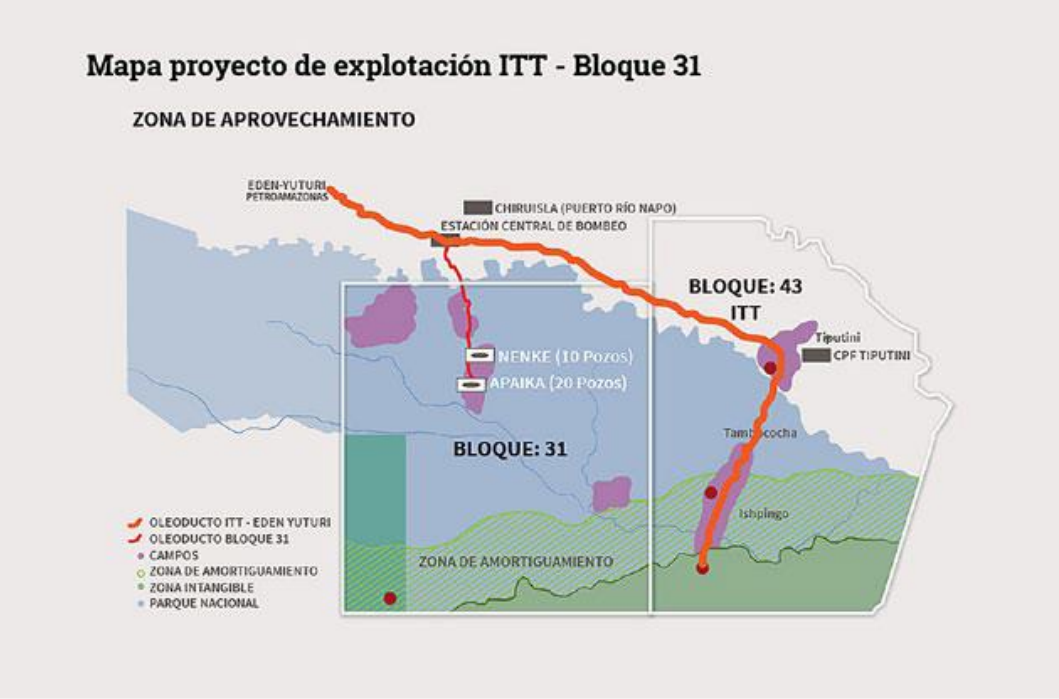
Introduction: A travel further up the river

I first met Javier Salazar, grandchild of Vicente Salazar [who gave his name to the community he first arrived in], during a 'tour of the communities' with the Municipality at the end of October (2016). When I asked Javier what he would do for the communities to be well, if he was the Mayor or the President, he did not hesitate before saying: 'All the basic services'[377]. After complaining about the ongoing disappearance of the Quichua culture, he described in great details the changing needs in the communities, and the reasons why their inhabitants need basic services that they did not need before. According to him, living without these basic services equates to living in poverty. 'I don't like it when people come to say that here, everything's good, and that we need to continue living like that, Javier later told me. The *indígena* too has the right to progress. What is really important is to reach progress without losing our culture.' [378] I was given the opportunity to witness the practical challenges associated with such ideal when I discovered the community of Samona, a two-hour canoe travel from the ITT block, further up the Napo River. Samona was the first community in the *ribera* to ask for, and obtain, drinking water as part of the social compensation from oil extraction in block 31, an older block in operation since 2000 and overlapping its territory. While the inhabitants needed and desired the drinking water, they refused to pay for the newly provided 'service' and Samona was, at the time of my fieldwork, the theatre of an ongoing conflict between the Municipality and the inhabitants, revolving around the monthly payment which comes with the provision of drinking water to their community.

[377] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[378] Conversation 2/11/2016.

I discovered the conflict during my first day in the community, where an exceptional *asamblea*[379] had been organised to discuss it with the *municipio.* I would spend my next three visits to Samona, between October and December 2016, investigating the reasons for the conflict and the claims of the inhabitants. My travels back and forth the Napo River would also provide an opportunity to discuss 'the water conflict' extensively with the inhabitants of the lower part of the river – Vicente Salazar in particular but also Santa Rosa and the communities of the ITT block (Boca Tiputini, Puerto Quinche and Puerto Miranda) – and with Juan Manuel and the Mayor in Tiputini. These conversations would allow me to infer what may well happen in the communities of the Lower Napo River in the subsequent stages of the oil development process.

Figure 40: Oil blocks 31 and 43 (ITT) along the Napo River



Source: Calderón (2014)

[379] Exceptional *asambleas* are gatherings which are organised punctually and outside of the monthly *asamblea* to discuss a specific topic – sometimes urgent and often involving some outside party (here the *municipio*).

This chapter is the result of such investigation. It describes the claims of the inhabitants of Samona against the idea of paying for the water, in all their dimensions (cultural, political, legal and economic), highlights the heterogeneity and coexistence of different responses to such idea in the community (which reveals different worldviews) and analyses the ways in which people's claims, perceptions and responses are reframed, throughout the conflict in Samona but also along the Napo River – in the lower part of which some of the inhabitants, who are given jobs at the same time as they are provided with different 'basic services', consider it is normal to pay for the services as long as one has a job. The conflict, thus reframed – a technical issue (lack of steady income) – will most likely be 'solved' by the provision of jobs – by the same oil company – to the inhabitants and result, in the following chapters, in the weakening of an already weakened subsistence economy.

The chapter not only highlights some of the issues and questions raised by the provision of basic services (and the payment it comes with) to indigenous communities which used to drink the water from the river. It also illustrates the inevitability of commodification and change, despite those struggles – and, in the present case, open conflict – because, ultimately, resisting is a source of health problems, while compromising might be a matter of survival. It finally sets the stage to investigate some of the consequences of such commodification on the economy, ecology and culture of the communities in the subsequent chapter (where I show that the biggest impacts from oil are indirect and long term and come from its benefits).

The asamblea – a first attempt of resolution

September 12th, 2016, 10:30am. I am travelling to Samona for the first time, with the staff from the Municipality. The agenda of the day: try and solve the conflict, and get the people to agree to pay. In the boat, Lucas, a *mestizo* working in the Municipality, explains to me: 'the issue is that they don't know how to spend the money. They only want to drink [alcohol]. We need to do more *socialización* in the area of how to spend money for the future. Investing rather than consuming.' Two hours later, we are in Samona. The guys from the Municipality greet everyone. I try to distance myself from them: I do not want to be assimilated with the *municipio* (*Alianza Pais*), especially in this context of conflict over the payment for the water. I go and sit in a corner. There are 115 *socios*. 66 people are absent.

The guys from the Municipality introduce themselves: the Vice Mayor, Martín the architect, and another man. I find them funny and a bit out of context, with their suits – way too warm for the climate. The Vice Mayor gives the people the 'greeting from the Mayor' and emphasises the 'obligation' they have to 'respond their request in an immediate manner' even though sometimes, there are good reasons why they can't assist them right away. But 'the insistence of the people blah blah'…'even though the Mayor is very busy'. So busy that he was not able to come in person today. 'But we are here, *compañeros* [comrades], to give solutions to the issues you have raised'. The Vice Mayor delivers a very long speech, to say three things: 1) we are late, but it is not our fault, 2) the Mayor could not come, but it is not his fault, and 3) now we are here. I understand that the Municipality has been meant to come for a while. The architect goes on to justify why they have not come earlier: lack of *gasolina*, unavailability of canoes, etc. And the last man concludes: 'it was not easy to get here (…) but we're here in any case now'.

The President of the community, Sergio, introduces the water problem straight away. I do not understand yet if the issue is that the bills are too high, or that they have to pay for the water.

It seems to be both. The Vice Mayor explains that a new *ordenanza* [ordinance] has been put in place, following a technical study. 'The *ordenanza* says the service has to be charged for, but it can be reformed: we need a legal analysis in order to change it.' He adds that the people might get a special treatment concerning the price, providing that the legal analysis goes in that direction. He goes on and explains that the high price is because of consumption: the issue is that some people leave the tap open and waste the water. 'The people are complaining about their bills, but they leave the tap open. (…) The same happens [to us] in Tiputini'. He explains how much one should consume per month: 15 cubic meters for a family. 'You need to be conscious of this', he adds. 'In the same way, some people have their spotlight on the whole day. We need to *conscientizarnos* [become aware]*',* he concludes – always including himself and the inhabitants of Tiputini, the village, in his critiques. He then reminds the *asamblea* that except for elder people, who get a discount, the basic tariff is 3.70 [dollars] per month, for up to 15 cubic meters. And, following some complaints by the inhabitants, arguing that there might be a leakage explaining their very high bills, the Vice Mayor commits to have someone come and check all the houses which are having difficulties [with understanding their bills].

One *socio* speaks. 'The proposal of the community is to pay 1 dollar, he says, for the basic consumption, instead of 3.70'. 'Because in Coca it's 2' but 'they have to pay twice as much, in compensation for their wealth'. Vice Mayor reminds the inhabitants that the price was decided on the basis of a technical study, which takes into account what the Municipality has to spend and invest in the maintenance of the system: 'We had put one dollar, but it was not enough. So we increased the bill in order not to have problems later. I cannot do anything about it, and the Mayor either. This follows a technical study. I can't violate the *ordenanza*.'

'But I commit myself, he goes on. If the President sends a written demand, to say that the price is too high, we'll decide something'. 'But ourselves, like that, we cannot do anything. The law does not allow us. We have to pay an operator, to maintain the system (…) With one dollar it

is not enough. We spent like 80.000 dollars. And the income was about 8-12.000. This is why we had to increase the bill. In Samona, Tiputini and Nuevo Rocafuerte [the three only places with drinking water in the *ribera*].'

A *socia* complains: 'some people are saving the water, and some others are wasting it. Some people haven't been paying for months and months'. 'I personally pay, she adds, and the ones who pay, we are very upset.' I understand that the community is divided between a handful of *socios* who are paying their bills, and the majority of people who are not.

A man comments on the economic situation of the people: 'some of us do not have a job'. Another young guy claims that Chiro Isla and Centro Ocaya, two neighbouring communities, are not paying for the water. A big debate follows on the respective situations of these two communities. 'They have an operator, there too', someone says. And they are not being charged. Another *socio* concludes: '*O cobramos a todos o a nadie!* [either we charge everyone, or we don't charge anyone!]'. The Vice Mayor responds that he did not know. He concludes by committing, again, to do 'an analysis' – because this is 'unfair'. But he continues on the consumption behaviour front: 'We complain about $5 for the water but we take money out for beers and this doesn't affect us. The water, however, is for the family!' He finally promises that the *municipio* will revise the *ordenanza.* But, he adds, for the ones who have had to pay for months, we cannot do anything about that. He offers the *socios* who have issues with high bills to come to the Municipality [in Tiputini] and discuss their case on an individual basis.

A young man complains: 'We trusted you. We supported you!' Vice Mayor reiterates that the *municipio* wants 'the wellbeing of the people': 'otherwise, I would not be here'. 'I am too transparent', he adds, before repeating that he has come here to try and find a solution to the conflict. And he goes on, with the same patronising tone – always careful to include himself and Tiputini, the village, among the group of people who is not behaving the right way: 'If you

didn't have money for a soda, or a beer, of course we would feel bad. But it's not the case (…). I don't say that just for you but for Tiputini as well. When it comes to services, they no longer want to pay'. 'So, *compañeros*, a bit of consciousness', he concludes.

He tries to put an end to the meeting, but there is a lot of debate going on in the *asamblea*. The conflict does not seem to be solved at all. The people talk a lot. Vice Mayor tells the *asamblea*: 'you have made a very good investment', before trying to conclude again, by planning another meeting with the Mayor.

The President of the community, Sergio, asks the *asamblea*: 'do you agree, *compañeros*?'… and a very loud 'no' resonates into the room. Another *socio* takes the floor: 'There should be a special agreement here, for special situation'. The Vice Mayor, seemingly tired and upset, replies: 'we came here to *socializar* the situation of the water. I can give you the dates.' He reminds the people that they can go and see the Mayor on Mondays, in his office in Tiputini, and he attempts, again, to put an end to the meeting.

Marina, the teacher of the community school [whom I would later be introduced to] speaks: 'it's a right for everyone to have basic services. We are just asking for our rights. As a Municipality, you have the obligation to provide us with basic services.' 'I worked in Coca, she goes on, and it was much cheaper.' She gives a price. Vice Mayor, apparently surprised, exclaims: 'this is extremely cheap!' He tries and explain, again, that although a unique price [for all the communities] is what the *municipio* would like, one dollar is impossible. And he repeats that a technical study needs to be carried to be able to reform the *ordenanza*: 'we cannot go against the law'. Sergio, the President, finally complains that Karla, the *operadora* [operator], does not measure well. A long debate follows. The Vice Mayor seems to have given up on concluding the session – he now keeps repeating that 'any demand, you have to do it in written'. I have given up on taking notes too.

1. Drinking water as part of the social compensation from oil in block 31

Samona, a Quichua community of 115 *socios*, was the first community in the *ribera* to ask for, and obtain, drinking water from state oil company Petroamazonas (PAM).

'The plan for drinking water comes from the compensation. I'll tell you the story'[380], Sergio, the President of the community, explains, as I interview him the centre of the community during my second stay in Samona, in October 2016[381]. Petrobras, a Brazilian oil firm, arrived in the *ribera* in 2000 to carry the seismic study in oil block 31, which overlaps with the territory of Samona. After three years of negotiations[382], the community and the firm came to an agreement regarding the social compensation. Drinking water was part of the agreement, together with a computing centre, a communal house, electricity network and a dock (retaining wall along the river). There were also grants for the students, and some health-related benefits. The agreement was finally signed in 2005.

Need and desire

The inhabitants recall with a lot of pride their idea of demanding the drinking water to the oil company. Marina, a Quichua woman, *socia* of Samona and teacher in the community school, remembers: 'it was decided during an *asamblea*. We started asking: "what do we need?" because we were going to receive some money'[383]. Sergio insists that 'it was our idea, nobody trained us'. 'I was the promoter of that idea', he adds proudly, 'but everyone agreed. We are the only community with drinking water'[384]. Ignacio[385], a *mestizo*, sociologist working for the

[380] Interview 27/10/2016.
[381] The following summary comes almost exclusively from Sergio.
[382] Contrary to Vicente Salazar, the entrance of oil company Petrobras created debate and conflict among the *socios* and the community opposed the entrance of the company for three years before they finally let it in, in 2003 [interview Sergio 27/10/2016]. This can be explained by the fact that the river was less polluted at that time, while people's conception of poverty might have been different and the desire for jobs not so widespread.
[383] Interview 19/12/2016.
[384] Interview 27/10/2016.
[385] I met Ignacio while I was doing nothing in the centre of the community, where he was not doing much more (i.e. hanging out and playing football with the inhabitants). This is also how I met Felipe and Luis, respectively Quichua and Huaorani men employed by PAM.

DRC for PAM, similarly recalls: 'In Samona, there were 2-3 people with this strong idea (…). And the community asked this. So we did it.'[386] Like the other communities of the *ribera*, the inhabitants of Samona both wanted and needed the drinking water. Indeed, before the water plant was built, people would drink the water from the Napo and Yuturi rivers, both polluted, and the source of various health issues. According to Sergio, 'the women get uterus cancer. Sometimes they go to hospital, some of them died. There is much contamination in the Yuturi River. Lots of animals have died too. (…) There's another disease, a skin disease, which appeared here. It's like small spots. And it's incurable.' As it is the case in most communities of the *ribera* they had access to *agua entubada* only in the centre. While Marina considers she does not 'have the knowledge to say if that water was good or not'[387], Ismael, an elderly Quichua man and *socio* of the community, remembers that '[before], the water was dirty'[388]. For Marina, 'this is a good decision from the *asamblea*.' 'For health, she adds. (…) Of course we are happy to have this water now in our houses!'. Sergio concludes: 'people are happy [about the drinking water]. Only about the payment they are unhappy.'[389]

Involvement of the municipio

The project was delayed as Petrobras left in 2007, due to a change in the Ecuadorian law requiring strategic activities such as oil extraction to be carried out by state-owned companies[390]. 'And they left us like this, Sergio goes on, without any construction work done. Only the written agreement'[391]. In 2008, the oil field was handed over to PAM. 'They reduced the agreement. As a public firm, they didn't have the same possibilities[392]. They removed the

[386] Interview 28/10/2016.
[387] Interview 19/12/2016.
[388] Interview 19/12/2016.
[389] Interview 27/10/2016.
[390] Details of this can be found in chapter 2.
[391] Interview 27/10/2016.
[392] PAM, as a public company, has a smaller budget for the social compensation (compared to private international companies), as I heard countless times from the inhabitants and oil workers alike.

matter of the grants, the building of classrooms and of a health centre'[393]. In 2009, after two years of negotiations, the community finally reached an agreement with PAM, 'with the same 5 constructions'[394] including the water plant. But the $900,000 project, too expensive for the public firm, required the involvement of the Municipality, which in 2013 added 450,000 dollars to the 520,000 dollars invested by the community with the money from the social compensation. The Mayor, whom I visited every time I returned from Samona (to Tiputini) – always with new puzzles and questions – explains: 'Petrobras had signed an agreement with the community, to give them water and electricity projects. The budget was 320,000 dollars for the light, and 200,000 dollars for the water. But the water project cost like 900,000 dollars. So the Municipality proposed that 1) they go ahead with the water only – so they have a budget of 520,000 for it, from the compensation – and 2) the Municipality puts the rest' – 450,000 dollars with its own resources, according to him.[395] Marina recalls the involvement of the Municipality in those terms: 'Petrobras said: "you can't do it yourself", so the Municipality got involved. This is when the tripartite convention started.'[396] And Raúl, a Quichua man, *socio* and ex-President of the community, summarises: 'President Correa bounced them, because he said he wanted a national firm to operate here. So Petroamazonas arrived, and the money was not enough to do both. So they did the water only. But it was still not enough, so the Municipality put some money too.' 'If Petrobras had remained here, he adds, we would now have water and electricity.' [397] 'And now they gave us the drinking water'[398], Sergio concludes. The plant was finally built in the centre of the community in 2014, through a *convenio* between PAM and the *municipio*. It reaches some 80 houses, on the same bank of the river as the *centro poblado*.

[393] Interview 27/10/2016.
[394] Interview 27/10/2016.
[395] Interview 29/11/2016.
[396] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[397] Conversation 1/12/2016.
[398] Interview 27/10/2016.

Figure 41: The water plant in Samona



Source: González Toro (2017 p136)[399]

[399] The picture was taken in 2016 by Patricia González Toro [a Master's student I met in Tiputini] and was originally named 'Nueva era petrolera en Samona Yuturi, bloque 31' (González Toro 2017 p136).

Paying for the water

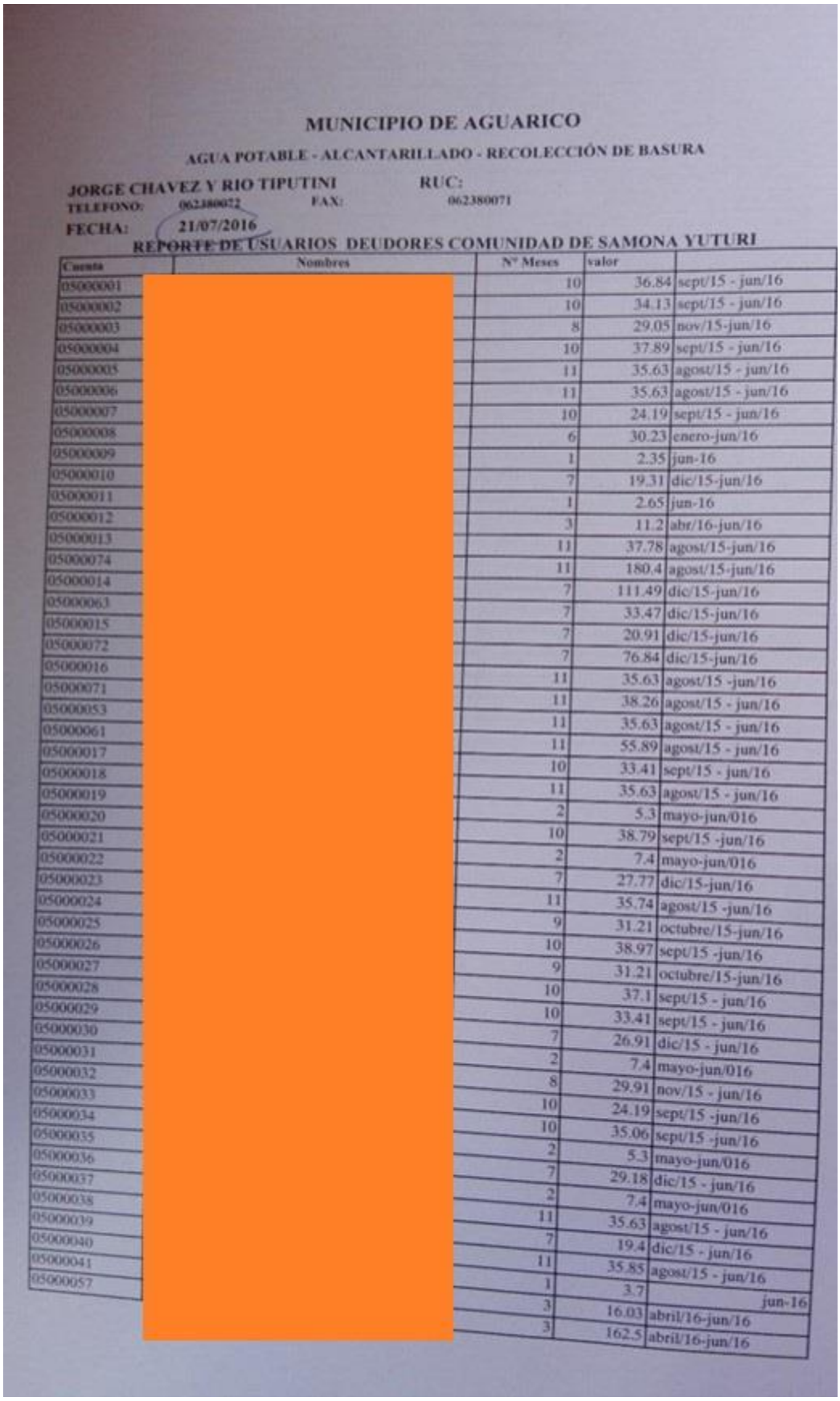
From June 2015 on, the *municipio* was in charge of the service [water provision] and maintenance of the plant. They started charging the inhabitants monthly and according to their consumption. Karla, a Quichua woman from San Roque (further up the river, near Coca) and married to a *socio* of the community, is responsible for the maintenance of the plant in the community. She also controls the water meters once a month. She explains to me – while showing me her office inside of the plant: 'The plant started to work in January 2015 (…) but the Municipality just started being in charge last June [2015], and I started my job too.' While the cost for standard consumption [less than 15 cubic meters] used to be two dollars[400], 'the Mayor came to *socializar* in August 2015 that the cost would rise to 2.70, and later 3.70[401]'. 'And the people accepted. But they didn't pay then.'[402]

In July 2015, three months after the service started, many families had not paid anything yet. 'They were asking for exoneration', the Mayor explains. The Municipality decided to exonerate the inhabitants for 3 months – and the Mayor, in his own words, 'put [his] own salary into that', which meant they would have to pay from August 2015. 'But they did not, and the conflict went on.'[403] From January 2016 onwards, the monthly cost for standard consumption increased to $3.70 as previously announced by the Mayor. The Municipality justifies the reform (resulting in an increase in the price, which had not changed since 2004) by a 'technical study' underlining the rising costs, as well as the improved quality of the service: 'it's also increased because the water is now drinkable, not just *entubada*[404]. '[405]

But 'a year and a half later, only 5 people are paying for the water', Karla summarises[406].

[400] One dollar, plus one dollar of administration.
[401] Both amounts include the dollar of administration.
[402] Conversation Karla 3/12/2016.
[403] Interview Mayor 29/11/2016.
[404] In the communities with *agua entubada*, the cost was also raised, from 1 to $2.
[405] Interview Vice Mayor, 28/11/2016.
[406] Conversation 3/12/2016.

Figure 42: Accumulated water bills of the inhabitants August 2015 to June 2016



MUNICIPIO DE AGUARICO

AGUA POTABLE - ALCANTARILLADO - RECOLECCIÓN DE BASURA

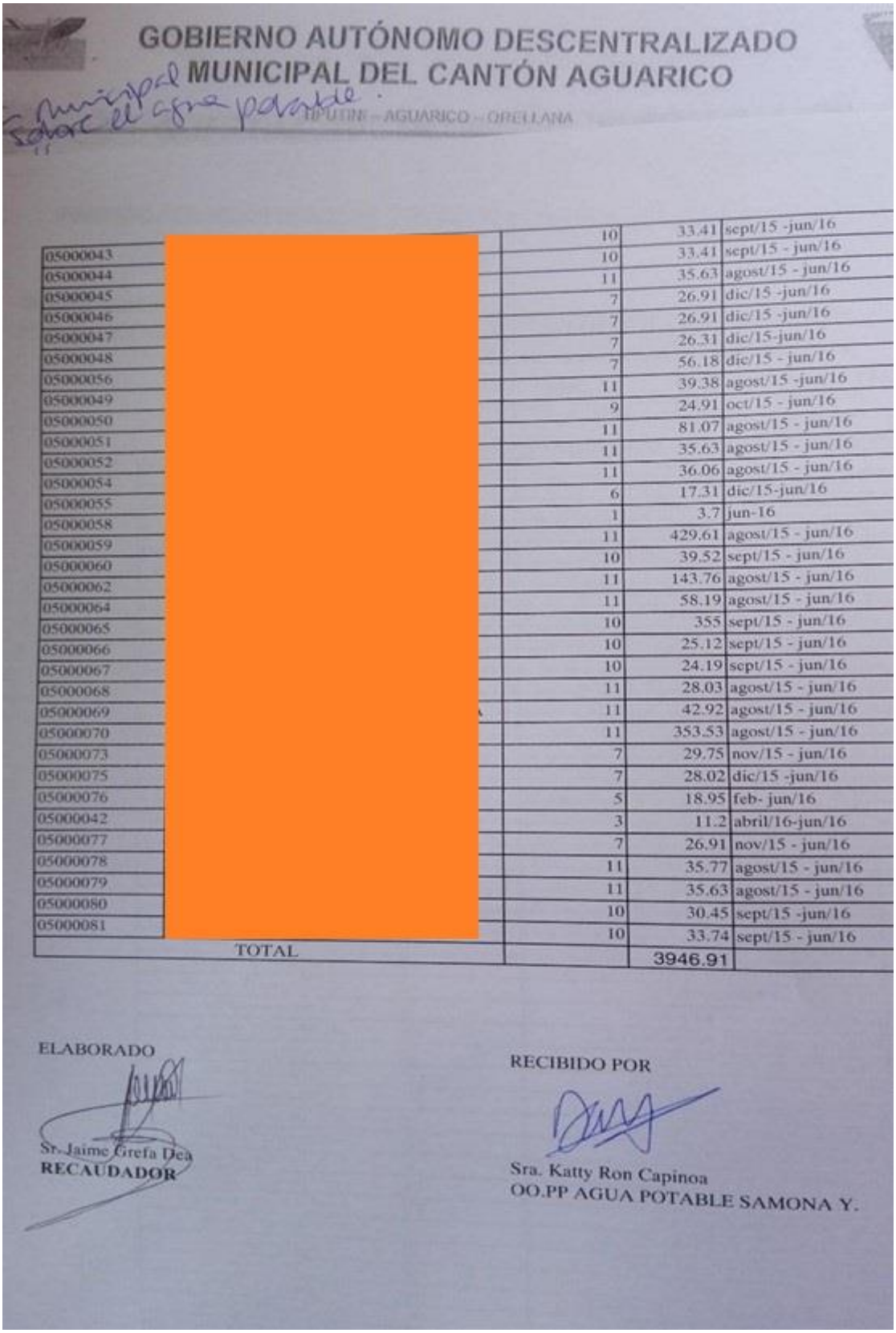
JORGE CHAVEZ Y RIO TIPUTINI RUC:

TELEFONO: 062380072 FAX: 062380071

FECHA: 21/07/2016

REPORTE DE USUARIOS DEUDORES COMUNIDAD DE SAMONA YUTURI

Cuenta	Nombres	Nº Meses	valor	
05000001		10	36.84	sept/15 - jun/16
05000002		10	34.13	sept/15 - jun/16
05000003		8	29.05	nov/15-jun/16
05000004		10	37.89	sept/15 - jun/16
05000005		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000006		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000007		10	24.19	sept/15 - jun/16
05000008		6	30.23	enero-jun/16
05000009		1	2.35	jun-16
05000010		7	19.31	dic/15-jun/16
05000011		1	2.65	jun-16
05000012		3	11.2	abr/16-jun/16
05000013		11	37.78	agost/15-jun/16
05000074		11	180.4	agost/15-jun/16
05000014		7	111.49	dic/15-jun/16
05000063		7	33.47	dic/15-jun/16
05000015		7	20.91	dic/15-jun/16
05000072		7	76.84	dic/15-jun/16
05000016		11	35.63	agost/15 -jun/16
05000071		11	38.26	agost/15 - jun/16
05000053		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000061		11	55.89	agost/15 - jun/16
05000017		10	33.41	sept/15 - jun/16
05000018		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000019		2	5.3	mayo-jun/016
05000020		10	38.79	sept/15 -jun/16
05000021		2	7.4	mayo-jun/016
05000022		7	27.77	dic/15-jun/16
05000023		11	35.74	agost/15 -jun/16
05000024		9	31.21	octubre/15-jun/16
05000025		10	38.97	sept/15 -jun/16
05000026		9	31.21	octubre/15-jun/16
05000027		10	37.1	sept/15 - jun/16
05000028		10	33.41	sept/15 - jun/16
05000029		7	26.91	dic/15 - jun/16
05000030		2	7.4	mayo-jun/016
05000031		8	29.91	nov/15 - jun/16
05000032		10	24.19	sept/15 -jun/16
05000033		10	35.06	sept/15 -jun/16
05000034		2	5.3	mayo-jun/016
05000035		7	29.18	dic/15 - jun/16
05000036		2	7.4	mayo-jun/016
05000037		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000038		7	19.4	dic/15 - jun/16
05000039		11	35.85	agost/15 - jun/16
05000040		1	3.7	jun-16
05000041		3	16.03	abril/16-jun/16
05000057		3	162.5	abril/16-jun/16



GOBIERNO AUTÓNOMO DESCENTRALIZADO
MUNICIPAL DEL CANTÓN AGUARICO
TIPUTINI – AGUARICO – ORELLANA

05000043		10	33.41	sept/15 -jun/16
05000044		10	33.41	sept/15 - jun/16
05000045		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000046		7	26.91	dic/15 -jun/16
05000047		7	26.91	dic/15 -jun/16
05000048		7	26.31	dic/15-jun/16
05000056		7	56.18	dic/15 - jun/16
05000049		11	39.38	agost/15 -jun/16
05000050		9	24.91	oct/15 - jun/16
05000051		11	81.07	agost/15 - jun/16
05000052		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000054		11	36.06	agost/15 - jun/16
05000055		6	17.31	dic/15-jun/16
05000058		1	3.7	jun-16
05000059		11	429.61	agost/15 - jun/16
05000060		10	39.52	sept/15 - jun/16
05000062		11	143.76	agost/15 - jun/16
05000064		11	58.19	agost/15 - jun/16
05000065		10	355	sept/15 - jun/16
05000066		10	25.12	sept/15 - jun/16
05000067		10	24.19	sept/15 - jun/16
05000068		11	28.03	agost/15 - jun/16
05000069		11	42.92	agost/15 - jun/16
05000070		11	353.53	agost/15 - jun/16
05000073		7	29.75	nov/15 - jun/16
05000075		7	28.02	dic/15 -jun/16
05000076		5	18.95	feb- jun/16
05000042		3	11.2	abril/16-jun/16
05000077		7	26.91	nov/15 - jun/16
05000078		11	35.77	agost/15 - jun/16
05000079		11	35.63	agost/15 - jun/16
05000080		10	30.45	sept/15 -jun/16
05000081		10	33.74	sept/15 - jun/16
TOTAL			3946.91	

ELABORADO

Sr. Jaime Grefa Dea
RECAUDADOR

RECIBIDO POR

Sra. Katty Ron Capinoa
OO.PP AGUA POTABLE SAMONA Y.

Source: Municipality of Aguarico, official document

According to official documents from the Municipality [figure 42 above], the 81 households in the community benefitting from the service had accumulated a debt of 3946 dollars to the Municipality during the first 11 months of operation (Since August 2015), and only 4 households had paid all their bills. More than half of them (44 households) had accumulated 10 or 11 months of bills since the beginning – meaning they had either never paid or paid only for one month of water consumption.

2. The water conflict

During our first interview, Sergio, the President of Samona, tells me: 'The people are not going to pay. They are not going to pay even a cent. This is why, it seems, the Mayor is upset. He didn't come to the meeting on the 2nd [of October – when an exceptional *asamblea* was planned between the community and the Municipality to discuss the conflict]'[407]. During my first stay in Samona, it was very clear that the inhabitants wanted the water for free. They were not short of arguments.

'The plant and the water are ours'[408]

First, there was a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the questions of rights, competency, the role of the oil firm, the ownership of the social compensation – and the question of who is responsible to pay, in a context where the community had put their own money into the construction of the plant, which is, as a basic service, a competence of the Municipality to provide, and comes as a compensation from oil extraction, which pollutes the river. For Sergio: 'The Municipality can't do anything. The plant and the water are ours.'[409]

While the Municipality was charging the community 'only the operative and maintenance costs'[410], most inhabitants seemed to think they were being charged to repay the plant – which

[407] Interview 27/10/2016.
[408] Interview Sergio 27/10/2016.
[409] Interview 27/10/2016.
[410] Interview Mayor 29/11/2016.

was unfair, in their view, since they had put what they considered to be their own money – the money given by the oil company for the 'social compensation' – into the construction of the plant. 'This is our money', Raúl, a Quichua man, *socio* of the community, tells me. 'If it was the Municipality's money, he adds, we would have been happy to pay.' 'Maybe after 2 years of exoneration though'. He was also under the impression that 'if PAM had done the project it would have been free'. Instead, 'the Municipality did it, with the money from the community, and now they are charging the community'[411]. For Angel, a young Quichua man, *socio* and secretary of the community, this is how the conflict started: 'From then on, the people (…) started thinking: how come we need to pay if the plant is ours? This is where the conflict comes from.'[412]

The Municipality had put half the money too – as the Mayor and Vice Mayor reminded me countless times: 'they say the money is theirs! Vice Mayor exclaims. Sure it's theirs, but with the 500,000 they could not have afforded a plant like this one. It's one of the best which exists.' [413] Marina was aware of the involvement of the *municipio,* and thought such involvement was the reason for the monthly payment. In a conversation, she told me: 'The water, let's see. It's from Petroamazonas. Or Petrobras, I am not sure. Then, they let it to the Municipality, because it's their competency. The Municipality said they put their part. This is why they are charging us for the service'. 'But, she exclaims, it's a basic service, it's a right, it's not a business'.[414] And, she adds, 'it's an obligation for the Municipality to give us water'[415].

The second misunderstanding came from the fact that the provision of water, as a basic service, is the legal responsibility of the Municipality – which for many people meant it should be provided for free. In theory, each GAD [*Gobierno Autonomo Decentralizado* – Autonomous

[411] Interview 21/12/2016.
[412] Interview 21/12/2016.
[413] Interview 28/11/2016.
[414] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[415] Interview 19/12/2016.

Decentralized Government] receives money for that purpose from the central state – something that the inhabitants were often aware of. But as Felix, the Mayor clarifies: 'the construction is one thing and the service is another. It should always be charged for.'[416] Indeed, as underlined by Felipe, a Quichua man working for PAM: 'the water system needs a generator, which consumes a lot of fuel. And people are needed for the maintenance.'[417] Karla similarly considered that 'we have to pay because it's a good service, because it's being maintained by people who know what they are doing. Here, in the community, we wouldn't know'[418]. According to Ismael: 'The people don't understand that when there is a service, it has to be charged. It costs the Municipality to *manejar* [operate] the system'.[419] And for Marina, the explanation was that 'Here we are not used to pay for basic services. We never had any!'[420]

I finally understood, while talking to Juan (a councilman, *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar), that the real issue was the initial investment made by the community, which should have been made by the Municipality – as part of its responsibility to provide for the drinking water. Juan was following the conflict from very close, as a way to understand the claims of the inhabitants (in order to find a way out of the conflict) but also as a way to influence its unfolding through recurrent visits to the community and conversations with the inhabitants. For him: 'They ask for basic services [as part of the social compensation]. It's fine, on the one hand, but on the other hand it's the responsibility of the Municipality to provide for the water. And the Mayor pushes them a bit to ask for those things to the company', he explains. 'PAM gave the money to the community, as a compensation, and the community gave the money to the Municipality for them to do the work. They want this service for free. It's very logical.', he adds. 'If we analyse the case of Samona well, he goes on, what happened is that they had to sacrifice this

[416] Conversation 25/01/2017.
[417] Interview 27/10/2016.
[418] Interview 3/12/2016.
[419] Conversation 1/12/2016.
[420] Interview 19/12/2016.

money from the compensation for a work which normally the Municipality should pay with its own money, as an institution of the state. And they have to pay for the service, when they could have invested that money in other things, which would have provided a return, instead of a cost'[421] – an argument with which Marina concurred, as she exclaimed: 'the community could have done something else with the money from the compensation!'[422]. 'The issue is the deception, Juan concludes. PAM gave them money from the social compensation, they had to pay the Municipality to build the plant, and now the Municipality is charging them for the maintenance. They feel tricked.'[423] As the prospective Mayor of Aguarico, he had his own idea of the way he would deal with the conflict in Samona: 'I would (…) discount the 500,000 they have put for the payment of the service. Then they pay'. 'It's normal that they pay, he adds. It's not that they had to put their own money for the construction.'[424]

'We supported you!'[425]

According to Juan, 'There's also a personal issue with the Mayor. They voted for him, they supported him, and he's changed his behaviour. He doesn't *atiende* [look after] them anymore. The conflict is very political, he goes on. If it was my project, they would pay me. Because I do respect their freedom when they speak with me.'[426]

The inhabitants were effectively upset at the Mayor, and the community's support for him was called into question by the conflict. A group of young men tell me: 'We've been supporting the Mayor for 15 years. Because he was a good Mayor. But it's no longer the case. Now we are going to support Juan Manuel. He helped us a lot, with advice and with money too.'[427] Marina was also on Juan Manuel's side: 'I worked 3 years as a political *teniente,* in Chiro Isla.

[421] Conversation 23/10/2016.
[422] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[423] Conversation 13/09/2016.
[424] Conversation 5/12/2016.
[425] A *socio* during the *asamblea* 12/09/2016
[426] Conversation 7/11/2016.
[427] Conversation 1/12/2016.

I never liked the methods of Felix. He's a family member of my spouse. But I never liked him. I have known Juan Manuel for long now, and he's someone I really admire'[428].

They also complained that in Chiro Isla and centro Ocaya, two neighbouring communities, the inhabitants are not paying for the water. 'How can this be?'[429], Sergio asks. After some investigation, the reason appeared to be twofold. First, the community of Chiro Isla did not have drinking water but piped water, which does not involve the same operating costs. Sergio confirmed that in Chiro, 'the water isn't drinking and isn't good'. Still, that did not justify the difference in treatment for him: 'But it can't be!, he adds. Either they don't charge anyone, or they charge all of us!'[430] Second, while the communities are usually being charged by the *municipio* even for *agua entubada*[431], it seemed that Chiro Isla had a 'political agreement' with the Municipality[432]. Juan Manuel reframed it that way: 'In Chiro, they do not pay for the water because the people whom the Mayor likes do not pay. There's a lot of corruption.' He adds: 'The Municipality is like the oil firm. They cheat the people. (…) in our country, all which is from the state is corrupted'[433].

Moreover, the inhabitants complained that there had been no proper discussion between the Municipality and the community, but a decision imposed from above. While the Mayor maintains that 'we socialized a lot in the community that the water was going to be charged for (…) – and they agreed', according to Sergio, the people did not know they were going to pay, because 'it was not *socializado*'[434]. For Raúl, 'the issue is that they socialized after the plant was built.'[435] Other *socios* argue that the Municipality had actually socialized the introduction

[428] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[429] 27/10/2016.
[430] Interview 27/10/2016.
[431] 1 dollar per month for the standard consumption, which increased to 2 dollars with the 2015 reform of the ordinance, as explained in the first section.
[432] Conversation Francis 13/09/2016.
[433] Conversation Juan Manuel 23/10/2016.
[434] Interview 27/10/2016.
[435] Interview 21/12/2016.

of the payment[436], but that it was only when the first payment was due that they realised it was actually not fair to be charged so much[437]. Angel concludes: 'the people accepted without knowing. *No somos preparados* [we lack knowledge].'[438]

Whether the people were actually informed is one thing. But the issue seemed to be one of negotiation, and discussion, rather than mere information. Ismael explains the difference to me: 'there was no consensus, they did not consult us on the price. If they had, we could have reached an agreement.'[439] Juan Manuel concurs: 'It was "*socializado*" rather than "consulted". *En el pueblo* you "socialize" that, but in the communities, due to the cultural difference, you have to "consult" them, meaning you have to ask them whether they are in favour or not. This is in one of the laws of the Municipality, but we don't respect it as a municipal council. (…) Here there wasn't any [fiscal education].' He adds: 'The Municipality is like a dictator. It imposes things.'[440]

We are free people

One day, back from Samona, Juan Manuel tells me: 'I realised the issue is not political, it's custom. They are not used to paying services and taxes. They are free people. [...] People are used to drink, spend money to share, etc. but *recaudación* [taxes] no, they don't want this, they want to be free'[441]. Two months later, back from another meeting in Samona, he adds: 'good that you didn't come. They were screaming at the Mayor. That they would not pay anything. That they are free. That they want to remain nomads. The Mayor was not willing to negotiate either. They say this: they want to be free. Like the other communities which are not paying the water.'

[436] Interview Angel 21/12/2016.
[437] Conversation Ramiro, an ex-president, 1/12/2016.
[438] Interview 21/12/2016.
[439] Interview 19/12/2016.
[440] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[441] Conversation 13/09/2016.

For the Mayor, opposition was triggered by Juan Manuel himself. 'The councilman, Juan Manuel, walks around telling them that they shouldn't pay. Because he wants to get elected in the next elections'[442]. 'It's because of Juan Manuel, who *se ha metido en esto* [has put himself into this], he continues, while explaining the issue to Joel, a fellow worker for the Municipality, during breakfast in Tiputini. He's putting into people's heads that [water] shouldn't be charged for'[443]. The Vice Mayor also complained that 'the fat guy [Juan Manuel] always visits them and tells them not to pay. They are in a mechanism of opposition to the Mayor'[444]. And indeed, Juan Manuel was now defending publicly that ancestral communities should not pay for the water: '(…) They have that right, as native people. This is in the Constitution, they must not pay taxes. (…) It will change the culture if they charge them.' He concludes: 'The Mayor *desconoce* [ignores] the law, and he *desconoce* their culture too'[445].

For the Mayor, this is not true. During the same breakfast in Tiputini, he adds: 'The Constitution says that the legalisation of territories should not be charged for. But the basic services do. Juan Manuel is interpreting the Constitution.'[446] In the meantime, the argument of some opponents to the Municipality was being alimented by Juan Manuel indeed. During an interview, Raúl tells me: 'Now we are writing a letter to talk about an article in the Constitution, stating that ancestral communities should not pay. Juan Manuel told us so.'[447]

Karla, the operator, disagreed with such view. 'What's that? she exclaims. We no longer live in a world where everything is free. It's no longer like that. *Hay que pagar para vivir* [You need to pay in order to live]'. She goes on: 'they do the native discourse, but they all know they have to pay to get services. *En el pueblo*, it's normal to pay for the water. They say that we are

[442] Interview 29/11/2016.
[443] Conversation 25/01/2017.
[444] Interview 28/11/2016.
[445] Conversation 24/01/2017.
[446] Conversation 25/01/2017.
[447] Interview 21/12/2016.

natives and I don't know what. But I think we have to leave this discourse of natives etc. Most of us know el *pueblo* by now and we know that it's normal to pay for services.'[448]

We don't have the money to pay

The inhabitants finally complained about the lack of a monthly income. Sergio tells me, indeed: 'Nobody's got an income. Before, there were jobs with the company. But there aren't anymore. With the crisis, they cut all the staff. They need technicians, but unqualified people, better at home!'[449]. Felipe, an oil worker, concurs: 'The issue is that many people do not have a fixed salary. They cannot pay. This is why there is a conflict'[450]. It seemed that after the period of abundance of short-term low-skilled jobs offered by the oil company (in seismic study), the inhabitants no longer had jobs and argued they did not have the money to pay for the water – an argument which Karla dismissed. 'No, there isn't that – she exclaims. We all have an income, from what we sell from the *finca*.'[451] In fact, it seemed that as they had engaged on wage labour with PAM, the inhabitants had abandoned the *finca*[452]. They had to start cultivating anew as the company left, and many of them no longer had an income from the *finca*. For Angel, secretary of the community, 'the issue is also that there are no resources. There's a coffee project with the MAGAP but we'll be able to harvest in two years from now. So some people have no money'[453]. And according to Marina: '(…) Here it's passive. There is no trade. Production is long term, it's not monthly. So some people could pay and some others could not'[454]. Ismael summarises the situation: 'People do not have money to pay for that. From agriculture: no money. From oil extraction: they drank and ate everything. Or they built small houses, or they bought beer and beer and even more beer'[455]. The inhabitants had spent the

[448] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[449] Interview 27/10/2016.
[450] Conversation 27/10/2016.
[451] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[452] I explore this further in the next chapter.
[453] Interview 21/12/2016.
[454] Interview 19/12/2016.
[455] Interview 19/12/2016.

money from the *indemnización* indeed – which in Samona amounted to some 3000 dollars per *socio*. Ismael, with the money, had bought himself a house in Coca. Karla was still not convinced, however. 'Some people say that, she goes on, but you realise that here, there's a shop, we buy rice, 2 dollars, we buy jugs of beer, it costs 22 dollars. They have money for petrol [for the canoes]'[456]. Money mismanagement was also the preferred explanation of the Municipality – as made clear during the *asamblea*. For the Mayor, 'It's because of their culture: '*plata que se coge se gasta'* [money which you get has to be spent]. They don't want to invest, they drink, they go and *farrear* [they go out drinking] with friends in Coca and done. Everything's over.'[457] It appeared, in fact, that due to the lack of income, the inhabitants bought most of their products from the shop on credit – and the different debt accumulated by the *socios* was a recurrent issue raised during the *asamblea*.

Moreover, and as already made clear in the previous empirical chapters, money is not all-purpose in the communities and, in particular, money is not to pay for the water. Subsequent developments of the conflict and search for a middle ground would tend to suggest that rather than just lack of money, resistance was against the idea of paying for the water – which in Samona was expected to be provided by the *municipio* for free.

It's too expensive

In addition, the cost for standard consumption (15 cubic meters per month) – 3.70 dollars, including one dollar of administration – was considered too high – when compared to the *pueblo,* Coca and Quito in particular, where some of the inhabitants have relatives or, more rarely, have lived. Sergio tells me: 'In Quito for example, they pay one dollar. And here, they charge us almost 5 dollars[458] for the basic amount. How come we are going to pay 5 if they pay

[456] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[457] Conversation 29/11/2016.
[458] This exaggeration of Sergio is probably due to the fact that people often consume more than the basic amount, as I explain below.

1 in Quito?'[459]. Providing water to indigenous territories is more expensive than for cities, because of the size of the territories and the distance between the houses. Indeed, the territories span thousands of hectares, with only one house every 200 meters[460]. According to the *municipio*, this fact, coupled with the small number of inhabitants in the community, justified why people were being charged more than in the cities of Quito and Coca. Karla explains: 'People say that it's less expensive *en el pueblo*, it's true, because there are 2,000 inhabitants! Here we are 83 [people]. So of course it's more expensive for each person.'[461]

While the standard cost was already considered too high, the issue was further amplified by huge bills that the people did not understand – something I understood as Juan Manuel tells me: 'People want to pay 1 or 2 dollars (…). At the moment they are paying bills of 20, 5, etc.'[462] According to Marina, 'It's very expensive. I lived in the city before and I am surprised by the prices here. For 4 people, I've received bills of 20, 23, 30 dollars.'[463]

The inhabitants sometimes thus accused Karla of not measuring well – an argument which Sergio reiterates during an interview: 'I am currently paying $27 per month, and I don't consume more than 5 cubic meters. It could be that the woman in charge does not measure well, I don't know what it could be'[464]. Karla, on the other hand, was convinced that people simply wasted the water: 'They wanted to have a meter on each corner of the house! She says. They had huge bills. And they say it's the operator's fault, because she does not see well!'[465]. What was sometimes considered a 'measurement problem' was simply due to over-consumption, for the Municipality: '(…) People use too much water. They don't take care of it, they leave the

[459] Interview 27/10/2016.
[460] Conversation Edgar 19/10/2016.
[461] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[462] conversation 23/10/2016.
[463] Interview 19/12/2016.
[464] Interview 27/10/2016.
[465] Conversation 3/12/2016.

taps open.'[466] The argument, made extremely clear during the *asamblea*, was recurrent during subsequent interviews and conversations and was shared by some of the inhabitants. Ismael, for instance, considered that 'the problem is that the people consume too much: they leave the taps open. The same happens with the lights. Sometimes they are on the whole day.'[467] Marina thought, for her part, that 'maybe for lack of knowledge, we didn't save the water enough at the beginning?'[468]. Overconsumption was, for Angel, a good reason why the water should be paid for. 'We have to pay for the *operadora*, he tells me. If it's free people consume too much'[469] A related issue was the total amount of the bills, accumulated over the months. Karla, while showing me the list of all the indebted people, exclaims: 'some people owe 15 months of water! Look. This sir, Raúl: he has two meters. In total he owes something like 80 dollars. Of course if you accumulate, it's a lot'[470]. Angel comments: 'I think $3 is good, if you pay it monthly. Obviously it becomes huge if we let the months go and pay everything at once'[471]. Marina seemed to accumulate both issues. 'I have invoices of 200 dollars since the beginning [for 11 months[472]], she tells me. And I consume almost nothing. My family is small'. She concludes: 'The price is towering. And in Coca [where Marina used to live], they pay 20 dollars a year!'[473]

3. Attempts of resolution

The community in charge?

At some point, Juan Manuel concludes: 'what they want is to be able to manage it themselves. That's what I understood yesterday. It's not so much an issue of paying, but of paying the

[466] Interview Vice Mayor 28/11/2016.
[467] Conversation 12/09/2016.
[468] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[469] Interview 21/12/2016.
[470] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[471] Interview 21/12/2016.
[472] According to official documents from the Municipality, in December 2016, Marina has accumulated 189 dollars for 17 months.
[473] Conversation 3/12/2016.

Municipality. They want to do it themselves.'[474] The Mayor had reached the same conclusion already. In an interview, he tells me: 'For me, the only way to solve the crisis is to make the community itself in charge of the maintenance of the plant. If they don't pay, I'm going to contact the *Senagua*[475] to see if they could give them some training, so that they can manage the project themselves.'[476] But none of the inhabitants I talked to saw this as a possible way out. They thought they did not have enough resources, knowledge and organisational skills to do it, and that it would be the end of the drinking water.

Ramiro, an ex-president, explains: 'The Mayor also told us that he would transfer the maintenance to the community. But it's no good idea, as our operator [Karla] would disappear. At the moment, she's getting paid by the Municipality. And there will be no more water.'[477] According to Marina, similarly, 'The community cannot be in charge, because it's not a public firm. The community does not have the training to manage that, nor the resources to pay for the operator.'[478] For once, Karla shared the view of the rest of the community. She thought that 'people don't want to be in charge of the service either, as the Mayor has been proposing. Because we don't know how it would be managed. I personally think that if we take over the service, it's going to be much more expensive. People don't want to pay 3 dollars, where are they going to find the money for the operator, etc? It will be much more than 3 dollars. (…) Even if *Senagua* is directly in charge, I think they are going to charge us. Maybe more than now. And they are not here so it's better to deal with the Mayor [who is in Tiputini]'. Angel summarises: 'the Mayor has to pay for the *operadora*. So the Mayor says: "OK, you can be in charge of the whole thing". But we don't want that either. The people want the Municipality to

[474] Conversation 7/11/2016.
[475] *Secretaría Nacional del Agua* (National Secretariat of Water) is an institution of the state which is responsible for managing water sources and access in Ecuador.
[476] Interview 29/11/2016.
[477] Conversation 21/12/2016.
[478] Interview 19/12/2016.

pay Karla and to give us the water for free.'[479] As I ask Karla whether the Mayor will end up cutting the water from people who do not pay, she responds: 'but if they cut the water completely, we'll have to go back to the river. How awful! I can't even imagine that'[480].

A way out?

By December, the stance of the community seemed to have changed following the November *asamblea.* They were now asking for 1) a period of exoneration, 2) a water bill of one dollar per month[481] – a proposal which had already been made during the September *asamblea* (half the price as in Coca, same price as in Quito). Marina later tells me: 'Of course we would be okay to pay, but not this price (…) People want to pay one dollar. Because it's a right we all have, it's a basic service, it's something vital. We are all very surprised by the price.'[482] One dollar, however, was still not an option for the Mayor: 'there are only 80 families, and with 80 dollars we can't repay any of the costs. 10 years ago it was enough, but it's not anymore.'[483] Some alternative proposals were made: 'What we want is to pay only half of the price. Because the project is not only from the Municipality, but from Petroamazonas too. More than half of the money. Therefore, Petroamazonas should pay for half of the service.'[484] And, according to Marina, '1 or 3 dollars we could agree. Even barter. We could exchange it with local products'[485].

On December 5th, I learnt from Juan Manuel that a resolution had been found. He tells me: 'The conflict is now solved. The Mayor went there and proposed to decrease the cost [of the standard consumption] to 2.70 instead of 3.70. It seems that they agreed.'[486] When I returned

[479] Interview 21/12/2016.
[480] Interview 3/12/2016.
[481] Conversation Marina 3/12/2016.
[482] Interview 19/12/2016.
[483] Interview 29/11/2016.
[484] Conversation with a man in the centre of the community 21/12/2016.
[485] Interview 19/12/2016.
[486] Conversation 5/12/2016.

to Samona, (for the last time) two weeks later, I was told about the meeting which had been held on December 4th: 'two weeks ago, there was a meeting. We agreed on $2.70. Now they agreed and they need to pay'[487]. Raúl adds: 'Some people are starting to reimburse.'[488] Karla explains to me: 'the people committed to pay. They are already starting to pay. The financial director came too, in the *asamblea*, to explain well that they are not charging us for the water (the water is not a business, it's free) but for the work [maintenance] they have to do. And the people understood. This helped a lot because, as you said before, the issue was that they said the water was theirs. Now they know that the cost is not for the water. The Municipality also committed to buy some food [yucca and plantain] from the community, so that people can use that money to pay.'[489]

'But the money that people had to pay for a year now is not going to decrease, Angel clarifies. And there is a 30% fine for paying late'[490]. That day, however, Sergio still disagreed: 'We want to pay $2 instead of 2.70. And without the *moras* [fine]. Nobody is paying this.'[491] And official documents from the same Municipality indicated that (six months after I first heard about the conflict) the total debt had reached 4,896 dollars, and 32 households had either never paid, or just paid one month, to the Municipality in 17 months of service.

[487] Interview Angel 21/12/2016.
[488] Interview 21/12/2016.
[489] Conversation 19/12/2016.

[490] Interview 21/12/2016.
[491] Conversation 21/12/2016.

Figure 43: Accumulated water bills of the inhabitants August 2015 to December 2016



MUNICIPIO DE AGUARICO

AGUA POTABLE - ALCANTARILLADO - RECOLECCIÓN DE BASURA

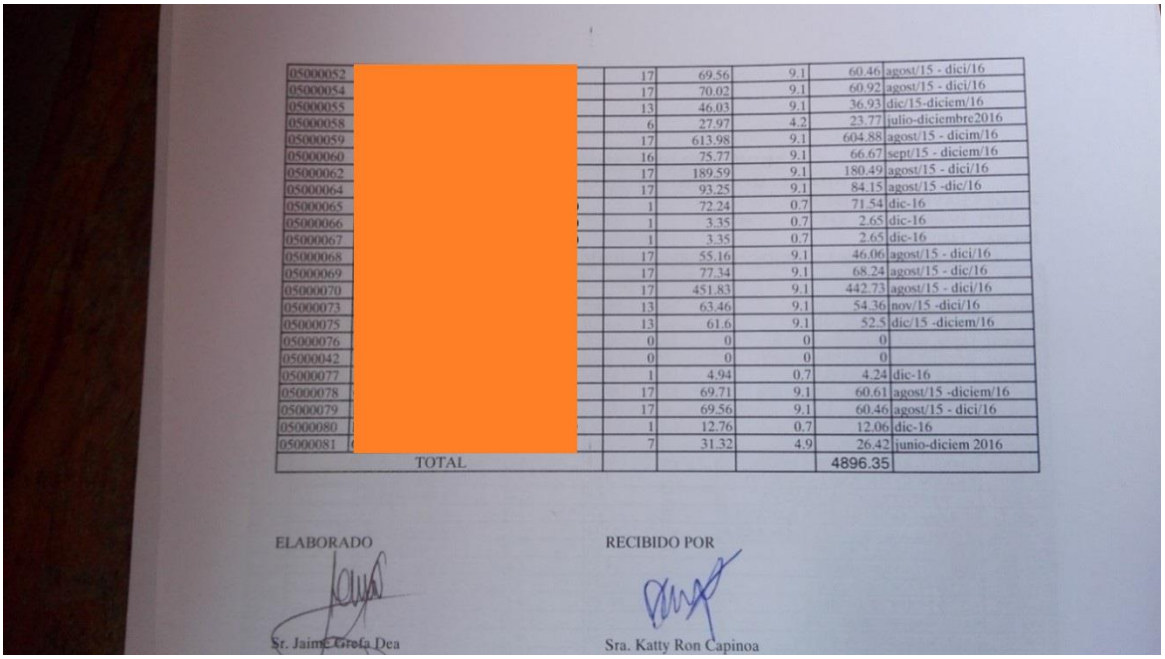
JORGE CHAVEZ Y RIO TIPUTINI

TELEFON 062380072 FAX: 062380071

FECHA: 24/01/2017

REPORTE DE USUARIOS DEUDORES COMUNIDAD DE SAMONA YUTURI

Cuenta	Nombres	N° Meses	Subtotal	(-)Recolecc Basura	Total	
05000001	[redacted]	16	70.87	9.1	61.77	sept/15 -dic/16
05000002		16	68.53	9.1	59.43	sept/15 -dici/16
05000003		14	62.67	9.1	53.57	nov/15-dic/16
05000004		2	9.48	1.4	8.08	novi-dici/16
05000005		17	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 - dici/16
05000006		17	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 - dic/16
05000007		8	27.58	5.6	21.98	mayo-diciem/16
05000008		12	65.16	8.4	56.76	enero-dic/16
05000009		1	3.05	0.7	2.35	dic-16
05000010		13	46.03	9.1	36.93	dic/15-dici/16
05000011		1	3.05	0.7	2.35	dic-16
05000012		2	8.8	1.4	7.4	nov-dici/16
05000013		1	4.4	0.7	3.7	dic-16
05000074		17	218.54	9.1	209.44	agost/15-dici/16
05000014		10	66	7	59	dic/15-dici/16
05000063		12	64.53	8.4	56.13	dic/15-dic/16
05000015		13	60.43	9.1	51.33	dic/15-dic/16
05000072		13	141.09	9.1	131.99	dic/15-dici/16
05000016		13	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 -dic/16
05000071		17	72.76	9.1	63.66	agost/15 - dic/16
05000053		17	70.53	9.1	61.43	agost/15 - dicie/16
05000061		17	98.07	9.1	88.97	agost/15 - diciem/16
05000017		2	8.8	1.4	7.4	Novie-Diciem/16
05000018		17	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 -Diciem/16
05000019		6	20.47	4.2	16.27	julio-diciembre2016
05000020		2	8.8	1.4	7.4	novi-dici/16
05000021		8	36.21	5.6	30.61	mayo-diciembre/016
05000022		13	61.33	9.1	52.23	dic/15-dici/16
05000023		17	74.28	9.1	65.18	agost/15 -dic/16
05000024		15	76.23	9.1	67.13	octubre/15-Dicie/16
05000025		16	73.77	9.1	64.67	sept/15 -dici/16
05000026		15	64.93	9.1	55.83	octubre/15-dici/16
05000027		16	71.13	9.1	62.03	sept/15 - diciembre/16
05000028		10	45.75	7	38.75	sept/15 - diciembre/16
05000029		13	60.43	9.1	51.33	dic/15 - dici/16
05000030		8	36.36	5.6	30.76	mayo-diciembre/016
05000031		14	63.57	9.1	54.47	nov/15 - diciembre/16
05000032		2	6.7	1.4	5.3	Noviem-Dici2016
05000033		16	69.52	9.1	60.42	sept/15 -dici/16
05000034		8	27.58	5.6	21.98	mayo-dici/016
05000035		13	62.83	9.1	53.73	dic/15 - dicie/16
05000036		3	13.25	2.1	11.15	oct-diciembre /2016
05000037		17	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 - diciemb/16
05000038		2	6.7	1.4	5.3	Novie-Diciem 2016
05000039		17	69.79	9.1	60.69	agost/15 - Dici/16
05000040		17	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 - Dici/16
05000041		1	6	0.7	5.3	dic-16
05000057		0	0	0	0	
05000043		16	67.23	9.1	58.13	sept/15 -dici/16
05000044		16	67.23	9.1	58.13	sept/15 - dici/16
05000045		17	59.56	9.1	50.46	agost/15 - dicim/16
05000046		13	60.43	9.1	51.33	dic/15 -dici/16
05000047		13	60.43	9.1	51.33	dic/15 -Diciem/16
05000048		13	66	9.1	56.9	dic/15-dici/16
05000056		13	103.05	9.1	93.95	dic/15 - dici/16
05000049		17	74.35	9.1	65.25	agost/15 -diciem/16
05000050		15	51.97	9.1	42.87	oct/15 - dici/16
05000051		17	127.35	9.1	118.25	agost/15 - dici/16



05000052	[redacted]	17	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 - dici/16
05000054		17	70.02	9.1	60.92	agost/15 - dici/16
05000055		13	46.03	9.1	36.93	dic/15-diciem/16
05000058		6	27.97	4.2	23.77	julio-diciembre2016
05000059		17	613.98	9.1	604.88	agost/15 - dicim/16
05000060		16	75.77	9.1	66.67	sept/15 - diciem/16
05000062		17	189.59	9.1	180.49	agost/15 - dici/16
05000064		17	93.25	9.1	84.15	agost/15 -dic/16
05000065		1	72.24	0.7	71.54	dic-16
05000066		1	3.35	0.7	2.65	dic-16
05000067		1	3.35	0.7	2.65	dic-16
05000068		17	55.16	9.1	46.06	agost/15 - dici/16
05000069		17	77.34	9.1	68.24	agost/15 - dic/16
05000070		17	451.83	9.1	442.73	agost/15 - dici/16
05000073		13	63.46	9.1	54.36	nov/15 -dici/16
05000075		13	61.6	9.1	52.5	dic/15 -diciem/16
05000076		0	0	0	0	
05000042		0	0	0	0	
05000077		1	4.94	0.7	4.24	dic-16
05000078		17	69.71	9.1	60.61	agost/15 -diciem/16
05000079		17	69.56	9.1	60.46	agost/15 - dici/16
05000080		1	12.76	0.7	12.06	dic-16
05000081		7	31.32	4.9	26.42	junio-diciem 2016
TOTAL					4896.35	

ELABORADO

Sr. Jaime Grefa Dea

RECIBIDO POR

Sra. Katty Ron Capinoa

Source: Municipality of Aguarico, official document

4. 'The same will happen everywhere': questioning Juan's prediction

One day, upon returning from Samona, Juan Manuel tells me: 'The same will happen in Puerto Quinche and in Bello Horizonte'[492] – two other communities further down the Napo River. Indeed, as part of the social compensation from the ITT oil project, which entered the *ribera* in 2016, most of the communities asked for 'basic services' often through similar *convenios* – as I show in the previous chapter. Some communities, such as Puerto Quinche and Puerto Miranda, have already signed a similar *convenio* between the oil firm and the Municipality to obtain drinking water in their communities, as well as electricity and sewage systems: in Puerto Miranda, for instance, there is another *convenio* in place for the light, financed at 40% by the Municipality[493]. And in Puerto Quinche, the community is also awaiting sanitation facilities[494]. Other communities, such as Santa Rosa and Vicente Salazar, are still waiting for their turn to start negotiating the benefits with the company (January 2017) and would ask for basic services

[492] Conversation 3/12/2016.
[493] Interview Emilio, an anthropologist (and priest) working for PAM in the DRC, 8/11/2016.
[494] Interview Bernardo, the President, 16/11/2016.

– drinking water and electricity respectively. In the communities of the lower part of the river, where I discussed the conflict in Samona with the inhabitants as a way to understand their views and perceptions on the idea of paying for the water, I often heard, indeed, that 'they must not charge us'[495], 'there is no reason for us to pay the Municipality'[496] because 'the water is from the community'[497], or that it comes from the company which 'is using our territories' and 'affecting fauna and flora''[498] Alongside the arguments against the payment, however, I also heard from the Presidents and *socios* of different communities that 'it's going to be charged for' but 'at a minimum price'[499], 'less than in Samona'[500] or that 'the amount of the investment should be deducted [from what they charge]'[501] – although Adriana considered that 'maybe if it's PAM, they will do it for free?'[502]. There was also, in those communities, much more heterogeneity and a sense that the inhabitants would accept to pay under certain conditions.

Vicente Salazar, with a relatively high number of *mestizos* [who come from other parts of the country where they have previously paid for basic services], of salaried workers (as I describe in chapter 4), and of *socios* who have a second house in the village, Tiputini, where they are already paying for *agua entubada,* was particularly heterogeneous. For Franco: 'as a "frontier", as a community, as a Quichua people from that community, they don't have any tax to pay to the state.' Instead, his view was that 'the institutions have to give this opportunity to the people who never had it.' 'They want to change our culture by charging us!', his sister Carmina exclaimed. 'The Municipality, because it puts meters, wants to charge them, but the people are not used to paying', Franco concluded[503]. Their brother, Javier, had another view: 'we have to

[495] Conversation 28/01/2017.
[496] Interview Salma brothers 27/01/2017.
[497] Conversation Edgar 28/01/2017.
[498] Interview Salma brothers 27/01/2017.
[499] Interview Bernardo 16/11/2016.
[500] Interview 9/12/2016.
[501] Conversation Luciano 11/12/2016.
[502] Conversation Adriana 7/12/2016.
[503] Interview 26/01/2017.

pay, he told me. Here, the politicians *nos pusieron en la cabeza* [made us believe] that everything was free, but it's not like that. *Las cosas se pagan* [you have to pay for things].' After telling me the people have enough money to pay, he adds: 'I mean, they do not have money but they do have a *motor 40*. I do have a job and I go around with my *peco*. I don't know how they bought this, it could be that they have saved up'. When I asked whether the fact of paying could change the culture, his response was unequivocal – and the same as he had given me on various occasions already: 'No, because the culture is not to be poor.'[504]

For Esteban, a *mestizo* and *socio* of Vicente Salazar living in Tiputini, the idea of paying is alien to the Quichua people (as opposed to the *mestizos*): 'Ahh well, like in my case as a *mestizo*, (…) I come from the city with that mindset already, so there is no problem with that' but, for the Quichua people, 'it might be *molestosito* [a little bit annoying] indeed.'[505] And Juan Manuel, who insisted that 'the same will happen as in Samona' recognised that 'here, they [the people from Vicente Salazar] are used to paying taxes, at least the ones who live in the village.'[506]

The issue was finally reframed as a technical one by Eloy, another *mestizo, socio* of the community, who happened to be working in water provision and systems in Tiputini for the *municipio* and considered that 'Here, some people *se dedican al trabajo* [work]. If we all had a job, it would no longer be a problem, [because anyway], the maintenance is not free.'[507] While in this part of the river the inhabitants are given jobs (by the same oil company) before (or at the same time as) they are provided with the different 'basic services' (including drinking water), it does make sense to question Juan's prediction and imagine that there might be much less resistance to the idea of paying for those services.

[504] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[505] Interview 26/01/2017.
[506] Conversation 24/01/2016.
[507] Conversation 18/09/2016.

5. Summary and discussion: drinking water as a turning point in the oil development process

Summary

The chapter discusses a case where the oil company comes with drinking water, as a compensation for the pollution of the already polluted Napo River, thereby solving a long-standing issue which has been left unaddressed by the state. The provision of drinking water to the inhabitants, however, does not come without difficulties. The chapter shows how the need and desire for drinking water, which has motivated the inhabitants to ask for a drinking water plant as part of the social compensation from oil extraction, slowly leads to a conflict between the Municipality, in charge of the service, and the inhabitants, who refuse to pay for such service. The conflict is multidimensional and reveals clashes of worldviews between the Municipality and most of the inhabitants, on the legal, political, cultural and economic levels: the water is theirs, it is free, it is a right, it is an obligation for the Municipality to provide, and it comes from the social compensation. Moreover, it is too expensive (more than in the city) and they do not have the money to pay. Finally, indigenous people should not pay for the water. The chapter sheds light on the mechanisms through which the inhabitants slowly negotiate and compromise on what they consider to be fair, until they ultimately agree to a compromise (which involves a payment) that they are nonetheless apparently not willing to meet. It finally suggests that in the lower part of the river, where the inhabitants are given jobs by the same oil company at the same time as they are provided with the different basic services which come as part of the social compensation from oil extraction in the ITT block, the issue is likely to be reduced to its more technical aspect (lack of income) and be solved with the provision of jobs, thus resulting in further change (wage labour) and a much less conflictive situation.

Discussion

At one level, the clash of worldviews highlighted in the water conflict is illustrative of the tensions and incompatibility between 'difference' and 'equality' (need to 'change' one's worldview to have 'equal' access to basic services). Indeed, the only available alternative offered by the *municipio* presents an inherent tension between two rights that the inhabitants claim: the right to have clean water, and the right to have water for free. While embracing change is a complete change of paradigm, resisting change (by refusing to pay for the water) is, in the present case, a source of conflict, and it could potentially lead to health issues, if the water ends up being cut from the inhabitants. In the end, the demand of the inhabitants appears too costly, and there is no political will to try and hear and understand their claims. As such, the chapter sheds light on some of the issues and questions raised by the provision of basic services (and, in particular, the payment it comes with) to indigenous communities which used to drink the water from the river. For instance, who should invest in the drinking water plant, given that it is a competency of the *municipio* to provide the communities with drinking water, but that the river (which is public) has been partly polluted by oil firms, during past and current projects of oil exploration and extraction? Who owns the money from the social compensation? On the other hand, why would indigenous communities benefit from the water for free when any other Ecuadorian citizen pays for the water? Is it a cultural right, or a mark of poverty, as Javier sees it? Where are the answers to such questions to be found? In the law? The international law? In the Ecuadorian Constitution, or in old indigenous institutions and rules? Those have to do with matters of custom, rights, legitimacy and fairness, and they should be tackled in order to find appropriate solutions to the conflict – a policy goal which is not mine here. Most importantly for the purpose of my argument, the chapter illustrates, once again, the inevitability of commodification and change (and of the difficulties of resisting change), despite those struggles (and, in the present case, open conflict).

Indeed, resisting is in this case a source of conflict and potential withdrawal of benefits, which could lead to health problems in the view of the inhabitants: if the community does not pay, they will end up going back to the river, which is polluted and the cause of health problems, so there is no way out to this conflict which would not involve a compromise and a payment. Moreover, some of the inhabitants are willing to find such compromise and part of the inevitability one can sense in this chapter clearly has to do with the heterogeneity and coexistence of multiple worldviews in the community and between communities. It is visible in Karla's reflections as a Quichua woman from outside of the community. It is also visible throughout the conflict, as the inhabitants keep reframing their demand and negotiating on what they consider to be fair, until a solution is agreed with the *municipio* – one which involves a payment from the community and is barely different from the initial one (which triggered the conflict). It is visible, finally, through the ways in which the conflict is being reframed already in the lower part of the river, where oil extraction arrived 16 years later than in Samona and where the inhabitants are going to be provided with all kinds of basic services (water, electricity, and toilets) at the same time as they are given jobs in the company – in spite of the heterogeneity which is still present there too. Such heterogeneity is illustrative, once again, of the fact that people's values are in movement. They are reframed and influenced with time, ecological and material conditions and constraints, and encounters (in this case with the *municipio* but also with members of the community, sometimes *mestizos*, who come from other communities outside of the *ribera* or other parts of the country and have sometimes lived in the city).

In that sense, the chapter illustrates how something which was impossible or seen as unfair (paying for the water) slowly becomes normalised. How a clash of worldviews might suddenly be reframed as a technical issue (lack of income) which will be solved through further change (wage labour) which will be the source of further tensions, struggles and problems. How people end up accepting what they are against or were initially opposing. How problematic situations

result in non-conflict and how, as a corollary, the absence of conflict does not mean absence of struggles, impacts and problems. How, in the face of a dilemma between 'difference' and 'equality', people might 'choose' the latter (and how it does not imply 'difference' is less important than 'equality'). All in all, the water conflict illustrates once again the inescapability of further change in the *ribera*, this time through the commodification of the water, despite the struggles and resistance such idea initially triggers. It is, again, an instance of non-conflictive, yet problematic situation. This is reinforced in the next chapters, as subsequent change arrives: with wage labour in chapter 7 and with the prospects of 'gathering' in chapter 8.

The chapter (and the case of Samona) comes as a parenthesis (a travel further up the river) which confirms many points addressed in the previous chapters (and the communities in and around the ITT block) – in particular 1) the need and desire for drinking water in the communities and the value associated with drinking water, for health reasons but mostly because it embeds a certain idea of progress, which is partly externally driven 2) the expectation to obtain the drinking water for free (especially when the people have supported the Mayor in the last elections, which confirms my suggestions on corruption in the first empirical chapter) and the idea that money is not all-purpose (and not supposed to be spent for water in particular which partly explains the resistance to pay for the water), 3) the lack of response from the state which the oil company comes to fulfil (how the *municipio* encourages such investment and how, by doing so, it avoids having to put too much money in the construction of the plant which it is legally responsible to finance), 4) the idea that negotiations with the oil company revolve around the social compensation (although in Samona, where oil extraction arrived much earlier, there was much more resistance than in the lower part of the river, probably because the river was less polluted then and development aspirations – and the need for jobs in particular – were less widespread), 5) a certain lack of knowledge (at least perceived) and lack of self-esteem displayed by the inhabitants, which reminds us of the dependence on the state described in

chapter 4 regarding training in agriculture and, finally, 6) the fact that the inhabitants have spent all their money from the *indemnización* and from their jobs, as suggested in chapter 5 and as will be developed in chapter 7. The chapter also anticipates on some of the themes which will be developed in the next chapter (and confirmed in the lower part of the river), such as 1) the fact that the inhabitants tend to leave the *finca* as they embark on wage labour with the oil company, 2) how they run out of money when the company is done with the seismic study and no longer needs the Quichua workforce, and how they have to go back to the *finca* which they have left on a side. Finally 3) it introduces the issue of costs for huge territories, and raises the question of what is to be done, whether indigenous people should be exempted from the payment of such services, why and why not, and if not, who should bear the costs of water provision, financially (a question to which some answers will be analysed in chapter 8 which focuses on the solution of the *municipio* for the community of Vicente Salazar).

In that regard, the chapter thus finally sets the stage to investigate the indirect consequences of oil on the communities in the next stages of the oil development process. The perceptions of the water conflict in Samona by the inhabitants of the lower part of the river (both in the communities currently inside the ITT block and the ones soon to be included, such as Vicente Salazar) gives us a sense of what will happen when these communities receive the drinking water as part of the social compensation from oil extraction: there might not be a conflict, or even struggles, in the face of the commodification of the water. The rest of the thesis will analyse how struggles finally arise in the Quichua communities of the ITT block as the provision of drinking water leads to both the transformation of the inhabitants into wage labourers (chapter 7) and their communities into *pueblos* (chapter 8) – a strategy of the *municipio* aimed at reducing the cost of basic services provision to large territories, in Vicente Salazar in particular – leading to a disconnection in time and space, but also in values, from nature and the subsistence economy (in addition to the pollution from oil).

Chapter 7. Working for the company: wage labour, laziness and the weakening of an already weakened subsistance economy (fourth empirical chapter)

Introduction: wage labour in an oil development context

As described in the first empirical chapter, jobs are desired by the inhabitants and seen as both necessary and lacking in the communities, and their absence is increasingly reframed as poverty. While the only jobs available before the entrance of the oil company are a few ones in the Municipality, the *colegio* and the health centre – all concentrated in the village, Tiputini, and requiring levels of education that most inhabitants do not have – the promise of jobs is one of the main reasons why the inhabitants accept the entrance of PAM in their territories – as I describe in the second empirical chapter. The previous, third empirical chapter, suggests that jobs might become increasingly necessary in an oil context where the inhabitants have to pay for newly provided basic services in their territories – drinking water and electricity in particular. Jobs are also available at unprecedented levels in an oil development context. According to official documents of PAM, 134 inhabitants from the six communities inside the ITT block (Boca Tiputini, Puerto Quinche, Puerto Miranda, San Vicente, Sinchi Chicta and Chiro Isla) were employed by different subcontractors of the oil company in seismic work, in September 2016. And according to the estimates provided by the inhabitants, the number of people employed by the oil company ranged from 10 (in Boca Tiputini) to 'everyone[508]' (in Puerto Miranda). After he confirms that in his community, 'the people wanted [the company to come] (…) because there were no sources of jobs. They wanted the oil firm to come and to give sources of jobs to everyone', Luciano, the President of Puerto Miranda, tells me – in answer to my question whether people are happy with oil now: 'What happens is that before there were no sources of jobs. And now there are!'[509]

[508] As I visited and exchanged with the inhabitants of Puerto Miranda, it became very clear that only the men of the community were working for the company – with some exceptions.
[509] Interview 17/01/2017.

This chapter analyses the question of wage labour in coexistence with life in the communities and its consequences on territories and people, in an oil development context. It argues that while jobs in the company seem to coexist with the traditional Quichua life in the first stages of the oil extraction process, full-time jobs in seismic study end up disrupting life in the communities as they conflict with the work of the *finca* and the communitarian events and obligations – as illustrated by the experience of Samona. The double disconnection (land and people) is not only due to conflicting schedules, but to changing values which are observed among the young in the ITT already. It is not new but is accelerated in an oil context characterised by the availability of jobs and money at unprecedented levels in the *ribera*. The dynamic itself is disrupted when, after some years of oil activities, the company no longer needs unqualified workers, leaving the inhabitants without a job and without cultivations – as illustrated again by the experience of Samona – thus in the same limbo as they were before oil.

By investigating the consequences of wage labour in the communities, the chapter goes further into the description of the impacts from oil – which are long term, indirect and come from its benefits. At the same time, it shows that the oil project only comes to accelerate a process of change (and cultural loss) already at play in the communities, by providing the inhabitants with 'benefits' which were demanded and desired prior to the entrance of the oil company. The chapter thus ultimately raises the question of the broader quest for 'equality', which in the *ribera* is in tension with the subsistence economy and communitarian organisation, ultimately leading to the weakening of already weakened subsistence economies. The chapter is based on my conversations with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar and their observations on changing practices and values in the neighbouring communities inside the oil block. Those comments give us a sense of what is likely to happen in an oil development context (including in Vicente Salazar). They also inform us on the ways such potential changes are perceived by the inhabitants before they happen and how values are reframed in the process.

1. Wage labour in the mixed economy

'Everyone wants money, but without doing anything'

The ITT oil project is not the first encounter between the Quichua people of the Lower Napo River and wage labour in the oil companies. Ineed, different international oil companies (CGG, Western and Shell) came to the ITT area for successive rounds of exploration since the late 1960s, and many Quichua inhabitants of the communities, men especially, have had some experience working in seismic work for those companies – in the ITT area but also in other blocks along (and, in some cases, outside of) the Napo River. In Vicente Salazar – where the oil project has not come yet –, people often recall their past experiences working for the company. According to Noa, an elderly man who worked as a *capataz* for Western, 'the conditions were good'[510]. Baltazar Baltazar, who also worked for Western, tells me: 'I tell you, the food was good, now they say it has improved.'[511] More generally, I often hear that 'it's good to work for the company'[512].

But while everyone wants a job, embarking on wage labour with the company is anything but straightforward and I keep hearing stories from the inhabitants about the reasons why they left their jobs before the end of their contract. Valentín, a young Quichua man from Yanayacu, explains to me: 'I didn't like the job anymore, because we worked from 6am until 11pm, the work was hard, [and we only had] a break of half an hour. (…) and after that, well I said, I'm leaving.'[513] Tupac's brother, a Quichua man, ex-President of the community of Puerto Quinche, working as an 'environmental supervisor' for PAM, tells me: 'I'll leave the job, I don't like working on Saturdays and Sundays[514]. His brother, also an ex-President of Puerto Quinche, explains: 'You know that Quichua people like a relaxed life. This is why I left the Uni to work.

[510] Conversation 17/10/2016.
[511] Interview 5/02/2017.
[512] Conversation Franco 2/11/2016.
[513] Interview 17/12/2016.
[514] Conversation 12/12/2016.

In particular, income is more important than studies.' 'But, he goes on, now I realise that I am receiving orders, I have to do what the boss tells me. And I don't like that.'[515]

Edgar, a *socio* of Santa Rosa who worked for French oil company CGG for many years (in blocks 18 and 31), recalls that at the beginning, he did not like the job. 'It was very hard', he tells me. But, 'little by little', Edgar 'won the trust of the boss'. He 'understood the rules and would conform to them, unlike many of his fellow Quichua workers'[516]. His account is illustrative of the kind of issues which arise in the encounter between the Quichua inhabitants of the *ribera* and the oil companies. Like Edgar at the beginning, the people often find the work is too hard while the days are too long. As Esteban, a *mestizo* from Vicente Salazar, explains to me: 'for any work, 'you need to make sacrifices, and you need to *madrugar* [get up early], in *sísmica* it's hard.' He adds that 'now at my age, I wouldn't like it anymore.'[517]

Moreover, people do not like receiving orders and following the rules of the company. 'Another issue had to do with security norms (…). Edgar continues. Some employees had issues with security. They usually go out to *machetear* [slash] without safety clothing, just like that, and they don't understand why the company is bothering them so much'. So Edgar explained to them: 'it's not to bother you but for your wellbeing'. 'Some people don't understand. When they misbehave, the firm has to fire them'. Finally, another recurrent complaint – from the oil workers and Quichua employees alike – has to do with *chicha* consumption. Edgar exclaims: 'They want to drink *chicha*! (…) Sure, some people don't understand that it's not possible to drink'. The traditional beverage made of fermented yucca is usually consumed and shared between people while they work in the *finca*, as I could observe and share with the inhabitants on many occasions. And its consumption is forbidden during working hours in the oil company.

[515] Conversation 18/12/2016.
[516] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[517] Interview 26/01/2017.

Aurelio, a young Quichua man, *socio* of Boca Tiputini, explains to me: 'it makes us a bit *chumados* [tispy]. And they [the company] don't like that.' But, according to him: 'it's what allows us to work more, and keep the food'[518]. For Santiago, a *mestizo* who works for PAM (in DRC), it is clear that many Quichua people leave their jobs 'because they don't like working'[519]. And according to Javier, 'Here everyone wants money, but without doing anything. They tell us "*pobrecitos"* [poor little things] and they keep us with the *paternalismo*.'[520] Javier, who works in the Municipality in Tiputini, later tells me: 'I personally cannot live without working. I need to maintain my spouse, and my children. There, in the community, they work, but very little. My brother Franco, I don't know where he gets the money from to be able to maintain his family. He barely works.'[521]

Jobs as a means to improve people's lives

During my stay in the *ribera*, I increasingly came to see what was often described as the consequence of laziness and paternalism by outsiders (and by Edgar and Javier, partly outsiders too) as a direct and logical implication of living in a mixed economy, where subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing and farming still play an important role, while jobs are seen as the provider of the extra cash people need to buy certain items they desire. Indeed, and as I describe in chapter 4, the inhabitants of the *ribera* obtain all their food from the *finca*, where they work a few hours every day, as well as from the river and forest – although hunting and fishing are increasingly limited by both the scarcity of fishes and animals and controls and restrictions from the MAE. In such context, jobs are seen as a means to obtain the necessary cash people need to buy some very precise items which cannot be afforded with the money from agriculture[522] and which are expected to improve their lives.

[518] Conversation 14/09/2016.
[519] Conversation 18/12/2016.
[520] Interview 8/11/2016.
[521] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[522] See first empirical chapter for a full account of the issues and insufficiencies of agriculture in the region.

This, coupled with the fact that the inhabitants do not usually 'save' or accumulate money in the communities, explains why they do not need to work for long periods of time – and why the compromise (three-month contracts with the company which they can leave whenever they want) seems to work. As Achacaspi, the capuchin priest of the *ribera*, puts it: 'they need money and jobs. But no more than to live. There is no concept of accumulation. This is why they accept oil extraction in exchange for candies.'[523] And in the words of Juan Manuel: 'What do they want? A small house, a motor. They also want to be free. They want to work, just for 3 months, and when they have enough to buy what they need, let it, and devote themselves to the hunting, the *finca*, etc. As they've always done.'[524] In fact, when I ask Edgar whether he would work again for an oil company, his response to my question is illustrative of such idea. He tells me: 'no, because I now have what I need: my *finca*, my chicken and my cattle'. After working for various oil companies when he was young, Edgar now sells his products from the *finca* in Tiputini and Rocafuerte, and considers it is enough[525].

People want jobs, and jobs are not seen as incompatible with the Quichua life. Instead, they come to compliment and improve the subsistence economy by providing people with some punctual extra-cash. But while both coexist, although in tension, in the early stages of the oil extraction project (as observed in the communities inside the ITT block), in the long-term money and jobs tend to disconnect people from the *finca* (as illustrated by the example of Samona). At the same time, new values fostered by money and jobs (described as individualism, greed and venality) are said to disconnect people from each other and from the community.

[523] Interview 24/02/2017.
[524] Conversation 13/09/2016.
[525] Conversation 19/10/2016.

2. Wage labour in tension with the *finca* and the community

In the early stages of the oil extraction project, jobs coexist indeed with life in the communities (subsistence activities and communitarian organisation), albeit in tension.

Conflicting schedules with community events

First, working for the oil company often enters in tension with the community events and obligations such as the *mingas* and *asambleas* – as well as other events or commitments specific to each community and *socio*. Such tensions are observable very early in the oil development process. As I attended the December *asamblea* of Puerto Miranda[526], where the oil project started in March 2016 and where most people are contracted by the oil company, I was surprised to see that almost half of the *socios* were absent. Ebby, a Quichua man, *socio* of the community (Puerto Miranda), who used to work in seismic study for PAM – 14/14 of work/holidays, as the contracts are often designed – explained to me the reason why he was able to attend the monthly meeting, unlike most of his *compañeros*: the company had given him the 14-day holidays at the end of the month, when the *asamblea* takes place, after he had asked for it[527]. He subsequently had to stop working for the oil company, however, as he was elected 'secretary' of the community. He was now working for the *tambería* [school boat], which did not conflict with the *asamblea* as he had his Sundays (day of the *asamblea*) off.

Not everyone's schedule could be accommodated, however, and most people simply missed the monthly gathering, which meant they had to pay a fine to the community. The issue was of course not limited to the jobs with the oil company: in Samona for instance, Ramiro told me he had to leave his job in the Municipality because the community thought he was 'abandoning them'[528]. And in Vicente Salazar, where I was attending the *asambleas* and *mingas* every

[526] 11/12/2016.
[527] Conversation 17/01/2017.
[528] Conversation 1/12/2016.

month, Francis and Juan, who both had a job in Tiputini, regularly missed the *asambleas* and *mingas* of the community. They had to pay a $5 fine instead.

Jobs and the finca: from coexistence (in tension) to the neglect of agriculture

Moreover, the inhabitants continue cultivating the land as they work for the company – as Antonio and Domingo, two *socios* (and teachers in the community school) of Boca Tiputini, told me during my respective interviews with them[529], and as I observed and heard very frequently during my stay in the *ribera*[530]. The organisation of work in seismic study (14 days of work, inside the *campamento* [oil camp], followed by 14 days of holidays in the community – or, alternatively, 21 days of work followed by 7 days off) allows people to continue working the land on and off during their contracts, while the rest of the family takes care of the work on a daily basis. 'You work 21/7 or 14/14. So you have 14 days for the work in the *finca*. To plant any cocoa, coffee', Luciano, the President of Puerto Miranda, explains to me[531]. Julieta, a *socia* of Yanayacu and one of the few women employed by the company, also explains that she works in the *finca* during her holidays, 14 days per month, while her husband takes care of it when she is at work[532]. In some contexts, when one of the two spouses works a lot, the other entirely takes care of the *finca*. This is the case of Belén, whose husband works for the company and stays in the oil camp 21 days out of 28, and whose children help after school and during their days off/holidays[533]. Furthermore, the short length of the contracts (often three months – and often repeated) means the workers can go back to the *finca* once their contracts are over – although, according to Franco, a *socio* of Vicente Salazar, 'it disorganises the family a little bit'[534].

[529] Interviews 25/11/2016.
[530] See *taller* Puerto Quinche 10/11/2016.
[531] Interview 17/01/2017.
[532] Interview 15/12/2016.
[533] Conversations 10-12/10/2016.
[534] Interview 16/11/2016.

Neglect of the finca, changing values and loss of social cohesion

But although wage labour coexists with the work of the *finca*, albeit in tension, in the early stages of the oil extraction project (and in the communities inside the ITT block), the experience of Samona suggests that coexistence does not last for very long. In Samona, where the oil activities started in 2000, the inhabitants left their *finca* as they embarked on wage labour with the company. The disconnection is not only due to conflicting schedules, but to changing values, according to some observers. Joseph, a *mestizo* living in Nuevo Rocafuerte, puts it that way: 'the *petrolera* [oil company] made the culture disappear. (…) Everyone, with their income, they stopped cultivating. They preferred to buy yucca from the neighbour.'[535] For Achacaspi, the priest of the *ribera*, the inhabitants 'care about nature only to the extent that it's useful for them'. He observes that nature is no longer that useful because they know money now. 'If they fish, he tells me, it's no longer by necessity but to sell the fish. And buy tuna cans.'[536]

At the same time, I keep hearing comments – during my walks with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar [in the context of the update of the update of the ESH] – about changing values in the communities further up the river, Samona in particular, where the inhabitants are described as individualistic, *ambiciosos* [greedy] and venal: they no longer offer food or beverage for free (but prefer to sell beer), they no longer want to work for free (*minga*), and they are more interested in their income than in the community. Javier, while drinking the *chicha* we have been offered by some inhabitants in the community of Fronteras del Ecuador [figure 44 below], tells me: 'In Chiro Isla, and Samona, they do not offer anything anymore. They do not offer you *chicha*, instead, they sell you beer. This is cultural loss. And this is because of oil.'[537] According to Sergio, the President of Samona, 'Everything moves with money. If you don't have money you are nothing. People do not want to work if there's no money. The oil

[535] Conversation 15/11/2016.
[536] Interview 24/02/2017.
[537] Conversation 20/10/2016.

companies taught them badly. Before it was *minga* (…). They were better organised. It was better. Now, if there's a gathering for free work, they don't want to know about it.'[538] Lopez, a *socio* of Vicente Salazar, adds: 'you know that the people, when they work, they never think of *opinar* [having an opinion] for the community. (…) They don't think the same way one thinks. Let's say, they think they are getting their income…'[539]. And Jaime, a young Quichua man, *socio* of Pando Chicta (born in Samona) and employed by the *municipio* in Tiputini, concludes: 'The only good thing that they [PAM] have done for the community [of Samona] is the water system[540]. The rest has made people more *ambiciosos*, because of money sometimes. Even the *dirigentes*. They no longer think *en el comunitario* [for the community].'[541]

Figure 44: Gathering in Fronteras del Ecuador with the staff from the *municipio*



Source: someone from the municipio

[538] Interview 21/12/2016.
[539] Interview 1/02/2017.
[540] This is the focus of the previous empirical chapter.
[541] Interview 25/01/2017.

3. Oil or modernity? a process of 'cultural' change (disconnection) already at play

These changes, depicted as unambiguously negative and sometimes explicitly referred to as cultural loss, are often attributed to the money and jobs which have come with oil extraction. But the process of disconnection from nature (as a source of livelihood) and people is not new and has not started with oil – as already visible (and implicit) in the first empirical chapter.

This is not new: Javierita recounts the loss of the vinillo

When I ask Javierita, an elderly woman from Vicente Salazar, whether people live better now than in the past, she recounts the traditional preparation of the *vinillo*, a traditional beverage which has now disappeared from the communities:

'[The customs] have changed quite a bit. Before, there was the *trago* [drink of alcohol]. They prepared the *vinillo*, from the yucca itself. They cooked the yucca, roasted it, and put it into clay pots. They would make 3 gallons like that. It was stronger than *chicha*. There isn't anymore. (…) At the time, today's *tragos* did not exist, she continues. They had the *chicha*, and the *warapo*, which is yucca with *maduro* [plantain]. This is still customary, but there is no longer the *vinillo*. (…) With very little, she goes on, one would get drunk. Sometimes they were drunk and they would fall. But they didn't drink like here, every week. Only once a month. For the celebrations, and mostly when they invited each other. There used to be three kinds of *chicha* to prepare. There isn't anymore, *ahorita* [today].'

I ask her why it has disappeared. 'What happened is that people used to devote themselves to *chicha*. Because before, they didn't study. They would send the children, and so, they could devote themselves to the preparation of the *chicha*. It was a few times, but it would take almost a week to prepare all those *chichas*. It would require time and patience, going out looking for firewood, looking for the things. And they could devote themselves to that. Now it takes

approximately 3 hours. Now we don't devote ourselves, and we don't have time, because our children go to work. It's no longer like before.'

She says 'it was good because they wouldn't spend a cent. They would eat and drink [from it]. This is why the people didn't get sick or anything, because they drank things they had prepared themselves. *Ahorita*, we drink beer, and the following day we are sick. They would drink, they would get up at 4 in the morning, and prepare the drink again. That's why nothing hurt in their bodies. They drank, they slept, the following day they got up, the women prepared and the men played instruments to dance.'

Figure 45: Interviewing Javierita



Source: the author

At the end of the interview, she adds that 'in the future, what is of ancestry, the hunting and fishing, will be a bit difficult now because it's running out. They will have to raise pigs, the cattle, and chicken in order to survive. The children of our grandchildren might no longer have meat *de monte*. They will need to make farms in order to eat. And as they will study, the grandchildren, the children of the grandchildren might no longer go hunting, they will study and *avanzan solo en oficinas* [spend all their time in an office]. They will only buy.' She says it pains her. And she laughs. I ask her whether this is good or bad. She does not answer my question and says: '*no hay mas* [there is no other way]'[542].

What Javierita describes is not new, and it is definitely not the result of the ITT oil project. Javierita does not even mention oil extraction. In fact, and as it was often the case with the elderly (who do not attend the *asambleas* and sometimes do not speak Spanish), I do not think she knows that an oil project will enter her community a few months later. What she describes is a broader process of change under way in the *ribera*, which she has been observing throughout her life: as they go to school (and work in offices), people no longer take the time to prepare traditional food and beverages. This has resulted in the disappearance of the *vinillo* (another traditional beverage made of fermented yucca), an increased need for money to buy what people no longer prepare and more diseases as people no longer consume what they prepare themselves. She thinks the same tendencies (of lack of time and dedication) might lead, in the future, to the end of hunting and fishing: in addition to the scarcity of animals already described in the first empirical chapter, Javierita predicts people will no longer have time for those activities. They will cultivate food instead, or even just buy it.

[542] Interview 31/10/2016.

The young have become lazy with money – leading to alcoholism and violence

It became increasingly clear, as I walked and discussed with the inhabitants, that the changing values they observed in the upper part of the river were also being observed in the lower part of the river, and more particularly among the young – who no longer want to drink *chicha*, stopped offering things for free, and are no longer interested in the *asambleas* and *mingas*.

As we are drinking *chicha* at Franco's, his brother, Gaspar, emphasises: 'here, you don't work, *te dan de comer igual* [and you still get food]. But our children are no longer like that. They don't offer anything anymore, because they prefer to sell it.'[543]

Figure 46: Franco and Gaspar carrying a pot of *chicha*



Source: the author[544]

[543] Conversation 31/10/2016.
[544] This picture was taken after the *taller* on culture, to illustrate the update of the ESH of Vicente Salazar.

The importance of money translates into inequalities as status is now based on the ability to acquire consumption goods. It also translates into difficulties for poor young men to find a wife. Javier recalls that 'while every woman (or her parents) used to choose her man and get married [as was recalled to me by the elderly a couple of times[545]], now it depends on whether you have a job, money, etc. Therefore, sometimes, women say no; that they do not want to marry this one because he does not have money. Lots of men remain single, because they never had a job.'[546] This only adds to the fact that weddings have become expensive: when I talk to some of these 'single men' in Samona, aged between 20 and 30, they explain to me that it costs money to propose a woman: 'You have to buy beers, etc. They require this of you now. Then if you find a good *suegro* [father-in-law], he'll help you with the money for the wedding. But otherwise, you have to pay for everything!'[547]

I heard time and again, moreover, that the young had become 'lazy' with money – a term which is used in the communities to describe a weaker commitment to both communitarian events and organisation and traditional subsistence activities. In Bello Horizonte, some men discuss the case of the young in those terms: 'They don't care about anything. They come [to the *asamblea*] only for the fine, not because they are interested. It's because of the companies: money makes them lazy.' The President adds: 'They no longer drink *chicha* but only beer. They come to the *asamblea* with their headphones, they can't listen to what's happening, they are not interested.'[548] The topic was actually a recurrent concern of the adults and elderly in the lower part of the river. During the *taller* of leaders organised by the FAL (and Amelia, a young Ecuadorian lawyer working in the *ribera*) in Nuevo Rocafuerte[549], the disengagement

[545] See interview Josefina 18/01/2017.
[546] Conversation 20/10/2016.
[547] Conversation 1/12/2016.
[548] Conversation 5/12/2016.
[549] November 2016.

of the young from their own communities, and the question of how to engage them again, were at the heart of the discussions.

According to the inhabitants, laziness leads to alcoholism and violence – the new plagues of the communities. 'Alcoholism is a big issue here', Javier comments during a conversation[550]. Alcoholism, mentioned in the ESH of all the communities as a current problem which is on the rise, is also a recurrent topic of conversation and concern in the communities – and became a daily topic in my conversations with the oil workers and the inhabitants themselves. The elderly, in particular, constantly mention it when I ask them how life has changed in the communities and whether they live better today than in the past. According to Zenaida, an elderly woman from Puerto Miranda: 'before it was good. Now the young people don't know how to work well. They are lazy. We used to work well. Now they spend their time resting too much, until being drunk.'[551] Kumanda, another elderly woman from Puerto Quinche, and Belén's mum, describes the issue in those terms: 'they go to the *minga*, they drink, they want to drink more. They spend the money from the *bono* [*de desarrollo*] which is supposed to be for the *wawas* [babies], the children. (…) They drink and then they start discussing and fight and then they don't even know where to direct their anger.'[552]

'Nowadays, Javier continues, there are also violations (rapes), because of the same alcoholism'[553]. When I met Alejandro, a policeman in Nuevo Rocafuerte, he confirmed that problems of intra-familial violence in the communities were on the rise – often due to alcohol consumption[554]. Both issues were effectively mentioned in the ESH of Puerto Miranda and Puerto Quiche, and I attended in the latter a *taller* organised by the government (Ministry of Health) especially on the question of intra-familial violence. I also witnessed both issues during

[550] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[551] Interview 11/11/2016.
[552] Interview 12/11/2016.
[553] Conversation 23/10/2016.
[554] Conversation 14/11/2016.

my stay in the communities, especially in Samona – which is also ahead in the oil extraction process. As Ismael, an elderly Quichua man from the community, puts it: 'The institutions: they provide us with good principles to *salir adelante* but they also come with "the other": alcohol, prostitution. And we are blind, and we get lost.' For him, both alcoholism and prostitution are caused by money, which comes from oil extraction. 'In all the communities where there is oil extraction, there is prostitution'[555], he adds.

Life is both better and worse as a result: change as both good and bad but mostly inescapable

As a result, the elderly often consider that life is both better and worse than it used to be. The elderly I interviewed, in fact, were often unable to say whether their lives were better now or before. They would either focus on one specific change [which they had in mind at the time of the interview] or would simply explain in which ways they lived better, and in which ways life had become worse. Javierita's response illustrates this idea well. Javierita considers that 'now it's better because we have more material comfort, more shops, we are less isolated and it's easier to get stuff. It's easier to travel too. Our children will have more education, and jobs, and all the basic services'. But she also tells me: 'Before it was better because we were free. Hunting, fishing, We could work or not work. Now they prohibit everything. Now we have to work [the land] otherwise we are poor. There were the weddings, this was beautiful. And we would speak our language. We were more organised, and there was less alcohol and fights. The young people are lazy.'[556] The elderly mostly agree on what the good and what the bad changes are. On the one hand, the changes they view positively are education and knowledge, freedom (as opposed to the 'slavery' during the *caucho*[557]), the improvements in technology and

[555] Interview 19/12/2016.
[556] Interview Javierita 31/10/2016.
[557] The *caucho* refers to the period of the rubber boom, during which the Quichua inhabitants worked for the patrons in rubber extraction. Descriptions of this period in the Lower Napo River are quite ambiguous. While the elderly people often refer to that period as 'slavery', they also often spoke of the patrons in positive terms ('he was a very good patron') – to the extent that many people in the *ribera* seemed to have chosen the patron as the godfather for their children.

transportation (fluvial transportation – boats and motors especially), the availability of shops, the availability of jobs, and the provision of basic services, especially electricity and water. On the other hand, they also point to changes that they view negatively, such as the loss of unity and organisation and drinking habits, the loss of the tradition of the weddings, the increased number of people, the noise (especially in the village but also in the communities due to the increased number of people), the lack of space, and the prohibitions from the state.

The changes which are considered unambiguously negative by the elderly and most adults, such as the disconnection from traditional subsistence and communitarian activities, are often tied to the good changes ('progress') which have come to the communities. For instance, Javierita, who describes herself as 'pained' by the disappearance of hunting activities, which she sees as the result of more formal education in the *ribera*, also considers that 'studying is worth it, (…) because they used to be all illiterate. When they sold products, they didn't know if they were being sold at the right price. So it's good.' She tells me that her *nietitos* [grandchildren] now help her sell her *bolsas artesanales* [handmade bags] in Tiputini, and so she's fine. In the same way, Zenaida, after she explains to me that one of the good changes has been the education, adds: 'I don't know if people will be worse off or better off in the future. It's in a very long time. Maybe worse off, because with the education, well, but then the rich is sitting in the shadow while the poor suffers under the sun. (…) Before, there was not such support for education. They didn't have money, they only worked for the *patrones* [patrons]. Now however, there is good support for the ones who are good. So, *el que aprovecha aprovecha, el que no aprovecha, no aprovecha* [the one who takes advantage takes advantage, and the ones who doesn't, doesn't]. (…) the ones who will study will be good. The others will suffer.'[558] In fact, in addition to the decrease in substance activities, I heard countless times that formal education (schooling) was the biggest threat to the Quichua language, as well as the

[558] Interview Zenaida 11/11/2016.

main reason why most inhabitants had already stopped learning and speaking it in the communities. Education was also seen as fostering new values which are alien to the people of the *ribera* such as, again, individualism and *ambición*. Franco, while talking about his brother Javier, says: 'my brother has another view, another philosophy already. I don't like the way he speaks. We chat, but I don't like it. He's married to a *mestiza*, and they have a house in Coca. Here, they stay at my parents. And he's not part of the community, he's not a *socio*'[559]. The more educated Quichua people, in particular some community leaders who have studied with the priests in Nuevo Rocafuerte, are even described as the most *ambiciosos* of the r*ibera*. The President of Bello Horizonte once tells me, referring to Fermín and Danilo, the respective President and ex-President of Alta Florencia and Santa Rosa: 'I personally told Achacaspi, the capuchin priest: "you have two bad disciples. They are *ambiciosos* and *no piensan en lo colectivo* [they don't think of the collective]"'[560]. Education, finally, was seen as a trigger of inequalities in the communities.

My conversations with the elderly were also often and mostly telling of the inescapability of change (as 'progress'). My interview with Celia, an elderly woman from Puerto Quinche, exemplifies the idea that change is inevitable. Celia, an elderly Quichua woman from Puerto Quinche, complains that the custom is getting lost because everything is becoming very modern: 'in clothing, for instance. In the navigation custom, with the motors. In the food even. There's almost no more hunting and fishing. Before, we could see the monkeys, from very close. Like domestic animals. There is no longer that because many people eat them'. I ask Celia whether she lived better before. She doesn't answer at first and then says two things: it's all more modern now, and also, we live more freely because there isn't the *caucho* anymore. She adds: 'Before, the animals wouldn't walk away. The ones who worked with the patrons,

[559] Conversation 2/11/2016.
[560] 5-6/12/2016.

they had *carabina* [rifles], the ones who didn't work with the patrons had *bodoquera'*[561]. I insist a little to know whether she perceives modernity as something positive. '*Que más toca?* [What else is there?], she replies. It's been a lot of suffering because the *patrones* would demand a lot. They had to work very hard. Now we work *a nuestro gusto* [as we please]. We have freedom. The one who wants, they plant cocoa, coffee. The one who doesn't want lives poor, because he doesn't know how to *aprovechar* [take advantage]'.[562]

Contrary to the elderly from the different communities of the lower part of the river, Marina, *socia* of Samona, has experienced the environmental impacts from oil. Her narrative sheds light on the same ambivalent relationship with change. 'I would like everything to change', she says. She hates 'when people (from outside) say: "here, nothing happens". "They are used to that, and nothing happens". "We cannot change them". The oil company says that for instance. But they don't know the real feeling of one. We don't have the space to say: "we don't want this anymore". They think we are happy. People from outside think that. But it's a lie.' 'It was different before, when I was a child, she recalls. We enjoyed the stages of the climate, clean water, and pure air. Now everything is changing. There was no oil extraction before, or water contamination, it was quieter, there was no alcohol. Our children were humbler.' When I ask whether it was better before, she says: 'No. If we talk about the environment and contamination: yes. But there are more needs today'[563]. While the disconnection from nature as a source of livelihood and from the community are not new, it is likely to reach unprecedented levels in an oil development context marked by increased availability of jobs and money – which is probably the reason why the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar tend to point

[561] Traditional hunting instrument. The Quichua people who worked for the patrons were paid in objects rather than money. More particularly, they used to receive axes, machetes, shotguns and clothes. This might explain the sometimes positive assessment of the patrons made by the inhabitants: as found in Muratorio (1991), the Quichua people worked 'by need rather than terror' (Wasserstrom and Bustamante 2015: 6): they needed the stuff that they could obtain from the patrons for their subsistence.
[562] Interview 12/11/2016.
[563] Interview 19/12/2016.

to the communities further up the river, with sometimes explicit references to Samona and Chiro Isla, when commenting on such changes. Actually, one can foresee that the need for money might increase exponentially as people leave their traditional activities.

4. Accelerated in an oil context (the future – middle and long term)

Endless new needs (and a self-reinforcing process?)

While the inhabitants need cash to buy consumption goods and improve their lives – as I describe in chapter 4 – the presence of newly provided basic services which need to be paid for means that the inhabitants will now pay for their water (which used to be free from the river), but also electricity and other services – as long as the sort of conflict which happened in Samona does not happen in the lower part of the river, as I assume in the previous chapter –, while the neglect of agriculture (in addition to potential expected damage to the *fincas*) might translate into increased proportions of food provision coming from (being bought) outside, as it is foreseen by Javierita. It seemed to be the case indeed that the inhabitants of Samona, where there were three small shops, provisioned from Coca, bought a greater proportion of their food than the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar (before oil extraction), with no shops and a great reliance on agriculture for food provision (as I describe in chapter 4) – and the fact that people buy food and drinks from the shops was in fact one recurrent argument of Karla and the *municipio* why they should be able to pay for the water (see chapter 6).

In addition to the growing need to buy food as agriculture, hunting, fishing and food preparation recede, there are other reasons to think that the reliance on money might intensify in the process of change at play in the *ribera*. The increased reliance on shops (and the resulting use of plastic), for instance, create a new need for garbage recollection systems and recycling which has yet to be taken care of (the inhabitants either throw the plastic in the river or burry it under the soil) – as I could observe in Puerto Quinche, where I stayed in Belén's house. People might have more needs in the domain of health as they eat less natural food and new diseases come in – as

suggested by Javierita, who already observes that since the *vinillo* disappeared, the people have been drinking stronger and less natural alcohol, such as beer and *puro*, the consumption of which has created new diseases. In the same way people might need more money to study as people need a degree in order to be able to find a job and sustain themselves.

Garbage recollection, formal health or higher education, all described as stated needs of the inhabitants before the entrance of PAM to their territories, are often expected to be provided by the state, for free (as I briefly note in chapter 4) and sometimes provided by the oil company as part of the social compensation. In Samona, for instance, the company is helping the inhabitants with transportation to Coca for emergencies, as well as scholarships for the students. The new 'individualism' of the *ribera*, however, could lead more and more people to seek individual means to access those services, which due to the geographic isolation and the absence of facilities in the communities, as well as the costs of transportation and of staying in the city, often result costly for the inhabitants. More indirectly, one could imagine that formal jobs and formal education, which require living away, going fast from one place to the next, and using time efficiently, might lead to an increased demand for improved means of transportation (boats, motors and oil), which are all desired by the inhabitants already (as I describe in chapter 4) and usually require more money than the subsistence economy can provide. In the same vein, and as we update the ESH for his community, Franco points out: 'We still don't have nurseries, but it will be necessary when we, the parents, go to work.'[564].

More generally, due to new, related, time constraints, people might also start paying for services that they used to take care of themselves. The point is that, as they obtain money, education and jobs, all desired and demanded in the communities before the entrance of the oil company, one can expect that the inhabitants will need increased amounts of money (and jobs)

[564] Conversation 16/11/2016.

to fulfil those newly created needs. The list of potential new needs is endless, and the goal is not to explore these boundless possibilities, but to underline the simple fact that money and jobs, perceived as lacking in the communities before the oil company arrived, are likely (and effectively tend) to become increasingly necessary as they become available, and at almost every stage of the process described above. As the need for money increases, the need for jobs increases too, which might result in less time for agriculture. In turn, the neglect of the *finca* makes both money and jobs even more necessary. Moreover, the process could easily become endogenous as people's values change, regarding the *finca* and the community in particular – as I explore further in the next chapter.

No jobs and no cultivations / same limbo and double scarcity

While the list of potential new needs (in an oil development context) could be endless in theory, the new dynamic itself is disrupted when, after some years of oil activities, the company no longer needs unqualified workers, leaving the inhabitants without a job. This is what happened, again, in Samona, where the inhabitants, who had left their cultivations as they worked for the oil company – because 'many of us thought the firm would stay'[565] – ran out of money. This explains why the inhabitants did not have an income from agriculture to pay for the water (in chapter 6). As Raúl tells me: 'Since there are no more jobs, the people had to go back to their *finca*. But they had to do it all over again'[566]. This comes in addition to the damage to the cultivations. Sergio, the President, recalls that 'here before our products were healthy. You could sow maize, yucca, plantain, and very big plants would grow. (…) Now they come out very small. The plantain is no more than 2 meters high. Same for the yucca, and the size gets reduced, they are rotten, and the yucca is like yellow.'[567] According to him, the inhabitants will probably use chemicals in the future, in order to have their plants and food grow the same way

[565] Interview Raúl 21/12/2016.
[566] Interview 21/12/2016.
[567] Interview 27/10/2016.

as before. He told me the oil company was already incentivising such practice in Samona[568] – yet another illustration of the ability of oil to 'compensate' for its own impacts while transforming people's ways of life and their relationship with nature in particular. While other people told me that they could see the damage on the yucca and plantain[569], Marina (who does not have a *finca*) maintained that the pollution was not visible. In any case, further longitudinal research focused on the impacts would be necessary to assess the real impact of oil extraction on the *finca* and its products in the long term. In any case and as I show in chapter 5, the inhabitants of the Lower Napo River (ITT and outside the block) expect their cultivations to be affected by the oil project (and some of them even argue they can already see the impact on the *finca*) – an idea which coexists with the belief that 'the *indígena* never abandons the *finca'*. This suggests that, even if the inhabitants of the communities of the lower part of the river do not 'abandon' the *finca*, as it happened in Samona – which is certainly possible given the perceptions of life with oil of the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar as described in the second empirical chapter – it might 'no longer give a good product' (as Antonio anticipated already in chapter 5[570]). And the prospect of moving to another part of the territory to recreate the subsistence economy somewhere else (as envisioned by Melo in chapter 5) might not be particularly attractive or satisfactory if it means the new needs of the inhabitants are no longer fulfilled (or, in other words, if they no longer have enough cash to fulfil their new needs). According to Achacaspi, the capuchin priest of the *ribera*: 'the people are pragmatic. If oil disappears, they will go back to what they had before [hunting, fishing and the *finca*]. But they wouldn't be happy because there would be less resources.'[571]

[568] Interview 27/10/2016.
[569] Interview Raúl 21/12/2016.
[570] Interview 25/11/2016.
[571] Interview 24/02/2017.

All in all – if the process of change might just continue reinforcing itself during the time the company is present in the *ribera* –, the inhabitants risk ending up in the same limbo as described in the first empirical chapter, this time marked by a worsened ecological situation and a weakened subsistence economy – due to pollution and the disappearance of the fauna and flora, the neglect of agricultural work, hunting and fishing, and other subsistence activities such as the preparation of traditional food and beverage – on the one hand, and many new needs, thus greater need for cash and less resources (to meet them) – from the commercialisation of the products from a damaged agriculture –, thus more unfulfilled needs on the other hand.

As a matter of fact, in Samona, I was told that the economic situation of the inhabitants was worse now than it was before oil extraction. 'Before (…) we were not poor. There were firms of coffee, maize, and cocoa.'[572], Misael, a *socio* of the community, tells me. Juan explains: '[Samona] was the community which would undertake the most. They had micro firms of cocoa, etc. They abandoned everything when the oil firm arrived. And when the jobs with the firm stopped, they remained without a thing.'[573] As I ask why the people preferred oil, if they already had all those agricultural projects, Misael responds: 'the pay was better'.

Studying in order to salir adelante?

Contrary to the inhabitants of Samona, who thought that the company would stay when they started working for it, the inhabitants of the lower part of the river seemed to know the company would leave the *ribera* after some 20 years – another reason to think that they might not 'abandon the *finca'* like the inhabitants of Samona did. And while some people seemed to consider there would be jobs for them during this time, some of the inhabitants, often more educated than average and leaders in their communities in some way, were aware that the low skilled jobs offered by the oil company would only last for the time of the seismic activities,

[572] Interview 30/08/2016.
[573] Conversation 30/08/2016.

after which the company would only employ qualified workers. As Tupac's brother, a *socio* of Puerto Quinche, told me: 'they won't give us any kind of jobs, because we're not *capacitados* [trained]. Nobody here will be communitarian relations' manager, or supervisor, or anything. Only workers.'[574] For Luciano (President of Puerto Miranda), as a result the way forward lies in education: 'Here the primary necessity is for the young people to continue studying, he explains. With time the oil firm will be done with the workforce and they will need only… engineers. Technicians. So the young people need to study and train themselves outside, to work as technicians.'[575] Education is one of the benefits from the social compensation which in some cases takes the form of scholarships to send students to university outside of the *ribera*. Leaving aside the fact that schooling comes with the same time constraints and changing values as jobs, affecting people's relationship with nature as a source of livelihood (as highlighted by Javierita), in practice I mostly heard about stories of failures. Moreover, degree or not, the oil company is only present in the river for some 20 years anyway – after which there will be no more jobs in oil extraction. In fact, the inhabitants [of Vicente Salazar and Santa Rosa] generally do not expect life to be better after oil, or in the long term. They are often aware that the company will not stay, are often convinced that they will spend all the money from the income and *indemnización* relatively fast – as it happened in all the communities where oil entered already (ITT block and Samona alike). When I asked Franco what would happen after oil, he replied: 'It's only for 20-25 years' (…) After that, they will leave us abandoned, but it's our children who'll have to deal with that'. He goes on: '25 years we'll no longer exist, because I am already going towards my 37…'[576] His nephew, a 18-year-old Quichua man, was equally optimistic. When I asked whether he would work in agriculture, in the future, he told me: 'I don't know, *ahí toca ver luego, de repente me vaya muriendo a la mitad* [I shall see later, I

[574] Conversation 12/12/2016.
[575] Interview 17/01/2017.
[576] Conversation 6/01/2017.

might die in the meantime]'[577]. According to Abraham, an elderly man, *socio* of Puerto Miranda: 'They will stay for 40 years. I'll be dead. The young people will have to go and look for a job.'[578] When they did not tell me they would be dead, the inhabitants sometimes said the young might have to move to the city to find a job and sustain themselves – a prospect which, due to the changing and remaining values of the *finca* as a place and as an activity, is a source of both desire and resistance – as I investigate in the next chapter.

5. Summary and discussion: oil just comes to accelerate a process of change already at play

Summary

The inhabitants of the *ribera* want to work for the oil company, notably in order to obtain the necessary cash to buy the consumption goods they need and/or desire. At the same time, it is often unnecessary to work more than one needs to obtain such cash. Jobs become the norm, though, in some of the communities in an oil extraction context. And while they coexist (in tension) with life in the communities (subsistence activities and communitarian organisation) in the early stages of the oil extraction project (as observed in the communities inside the ITT block), they end up disrupting it as people start neglecting the *finca* and communitarian activities as they embarked on wage labour (as illustrated by the situation in Samona).

This is not only due to conflicting schedules but changing values: people become individualistic, *ambiciosos* and venal with jobs, according to the inhabitants of the lower part of the river. The process of double disconnection (from nature and between people) is not new and has not started with oil extraction. It is the result of more formal education and jobs and, more generally, a form of progress which tends to be necessarily in tension with traditional subsistence activities and community life. In that vein, Javierita describes how some of the

[577] Interview 26/01/2017.
[578] Interview 18/01/2017.

subsistence activities such as the preparation of the *vinillo* have disappeared as the result of people going to school and working. The same tendencies are observed among the young in the lower part of the river already: as the story goes, money makes them 'lazy' – a term which is used to describe the loss of interest in both traditional subsistence activities and the community – and laziness leads to alcoholism and violence in the communities, in the view of the inhabitants. This is why the elderly tend to depict change as an inevitable process which has brought good and bad changes with it, and which will continue to do so – as my interviews with them illustrate. The oil extraction project comes, in this context, to accelerate a process of change (disconnection from nature and between people) already at play before the entrance of the oil company, by responding to the inhabitants' desires for jobs and money, seen as necessary and lacking and demanded by the inhabitants before the entrance of PAM in the communities. It is easy to imagine how the process could lead to endless new needs and notably a growing need for money and jobs for people to be able to meet those new needs – and how it might become endogenous as people's changing values come to feed it. The dynamic itself, however, is disrupted as the company leaves the *ribera*, some 20 years after the beginning of the activities, a point where the people might end up in the same 'limbo' described in the first empirical chapter (before the entrance of the company) – that is, a double scarcity (of 'nature' and cash) and many unfulfilled needs. This could even happen after a few years of seismic work, when the company no longer needs the unqualified workers from the communities. Some of the inhabitants argue, at that point, that the young should go to the city to live and find a job, and the next chapter will explore people's perceptions of such a prospect.

Discussion

At a first level (and in the same way as with drinking water in the previous chapter), the chapter describes the tension between desiring and resisting change (in this case wage labour), but also the inevitability of wage labour in the communities (despite the struggles) and how jobs

ultimately impact on people and nature – resulting, again, in non-conflictive, yet problematic situations and a double disconnection: between people and nature (in time and interest/value, in addition to the pollution from the oil project) and between people. The double disconnection is partly due to the new pressures on the environment (time and pollution related) but also and mostly to the changing values of the inhabitants regarding nature and its uses (traditional subsistence activities) – resulting in a reframing of people's very ecological and cultural difference – and the community. It should be noted that the communitarian organisation and events and social cohesion in the communities are tightly based on the relationship between people and nature as they are about the collective transformation of nature for people's livelihoods – contrary to schooling and wage labour which are both individualistic and disconnected from the land and territory. This is also one of the reasons why inequalities necessarily arise as money replaces nature as a source of livelihood – a point which I have not fully developed here for reasons of space.

While it is clear that such (double) disconnection is accelerated in an oil development context marked by unprecedented job opportunities for the Quichua inhabitants and a greater need for cash as people will have to pay for newly provided basic services, it is equally clear that the tendency was already here – as visible already in chapter 4, 'before oil', and as highlighted by my conversations with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar in this chapter. It follows that the trigger of such a process, which is described as a process of cultural change, is not oil but a form of development which is desired by the inhabitants while it is inherently in tension with the Quichua traditional life, and is made available to the communities through (the social compensation from) the oil project. In other words, oil comes to further disconnect people from nature and from each other by providing the inhabitants with what they consider they need and is lacking already prior to the entrance of the oil company in their territories (see chapter 4). At a second level, the chapter thus suggests that oil just comes to accelerate a process of (cultural)

change already at play in the communities before the entrance of the oil company, by responding to the inhabitants' demands for money and jobs, seen as necessary and lacking.

From an MCA perspective (and in an MCA language), the chapter thus shows that the biggest 'impacts' from oil are long term, indirect and come from its 'benefits' (rather than its direct impacts), through the social compensation: 'cultural' change arises indirectly in the medium and long term as oil responds to the demands of the inhabitants described in chapter 4 (for money, jobs and state provision), through the social compensation from oil. In other words, if oil extraction is a package with 'impacts' and 'benefits', the 'benefits' are the trigger of the biggest 'impacts' and oil finally appears as a package with both direct and indirect impacts – or from a different perspective, as a provider of development, itself damaging of nature and humans. At this stage, a new oil story emerges. It is a story of acceptation in spite of people's ecological and cultural difference (a special relationship with the environment as a source of livelihood and cultural identity), which 1) is already damaged prior to the entrance of the company – partly due to oil extraction projects further up the river and exploration in the ITT area –, rendering the 'benefits' from oil necessary (as explained in chapter 4), 2) will be further damaged by the direct 'impacts' from the oil project (as explained in chapter 5) – making the benefits from oil even more necessary (as some of the benefits can 'compensate' for the impacts) – and 3) will be even further damaged by the 'benefits' from oil, which are made even more necessary by the direct impacts and increased scarcity in nature (as explained in this chapter). The story could probably go on forever (and follow the hypothetical predictions described in section 4) if the company did not leave the *ribera* – a point to which I return below.

For now, this updated story suggests at least two things. On the one hand, the impacts could hardly be anticipated at the time the decision to let the company in was made. It is worth remembering, in that regard, that the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar told me they would never abandon the *finca*, when discussing the impacts on the cultivations in chapter 5. This arguably

reinforces further the inevitability of acceptance (which is highlighted in chapter 5). And the changing values described by the inhabitants might in fact be where most of the inevitability comes from: indeed, as values of the *finca*, subsistence economy and communitarian organisation change, cultural change is perceived differently, and it becomes partly endogenous (as is visible among the young in particular). I investigate such changing values in more depth in the next chapter. It suggests, on the other hand, that the impacts could only be avoided by renouncing (not only the oil project but) the benefits of modernity such as jobs, money and drinking water, which are considered necessary and lacking in the communities and are desired by the inhabitants. The chapter thus ultimately raises the question of the broader quest for 'equality' and modernity (in this case wage labour, basic services, money and education), which in the *ribera* as in many other places around the world is in tension with the subsistence economy and communitarian organisation (as already suggested in chapter 4) and constantly creates a tension and a dilemma between 'difference' and 'equality' which ultimately leads the inhabitants to act in favour of an ecologically destructive project and against their own cultural 'difference' – not only through their responses to the *consulta previa* but through subsequent (oil and development) decisions. I come back to this tension in the next chapter again.

The process seems to result, as the chapter shows, in the weakening of already weakened subsistence economies (already weakened due to the growing pressures on subsistence activities, pollution of the river, controls on hunting and fishing and scarcity of fishes and animals as well as the insufficiencies of agriculture and changing considerations of the inhabitants which are all described in chapter 4) with direct impacts on the environment (such as further pollution of the river, disappearance of the animals and damage to the forest and *fincas* which are detailed in chapter 5), on the one hand, and benefits, on the other hand, such as money and jobs, which are likely to increase the disconnection between people and nature: while people have abandoned the collective preparation of some traditional food, such as the

vinillo, due to both less time and changing interests, they are likely to start neglecting the *finca*, as well as hunting and fishing activities, due again to both less time and changing interests, in an oil context marked by increased availability of jobs and money. It results, in turn, in an increased dependence on money and jobs.

While what I describe here as cultural change is obviously not a problem per se (again, the changes described in this chapter might become attractive to the inhabitants, as values change), it was clearly framed in a negative way by most of my informants in the *ribera* (as my conversations with them show) and, most importantly, it is based on an activity which is only lasting for 20 years and is likely to result in a crisis, which is economic, social and ecological, as the company leaves the *ribera* and leaves the inhabitants without jobs, with a weaker subsistence economy and a weaker sense of social cohesion in the communities. In other words, the inhabitants might end up in the same 'limbo' described in chapter 4 ('before oil'), that is, a double scarcity in both nature and cash, but this time with an ever degraded economic, ecological and social situation. At a third level, more normative and in relation with the future of the communities, the chapter thus comes to close the empirical story by describing the situation of the communities after the entrance of the oil company, in the middle and long term.

Chapter 8. Gathering in the centre: the city, the village, the community and the (remaining and changing) values of the *finca* (fifth empirical chapter)

Introduction: the plan of the *municipio* for Vicente Salazar

'Sometimes the families are too far away from each other for that to be feasible'[579], the Mayor tells me during a breakfast in the Colombian *comedor* in Tiputini. He is referring to the provision of drinking water, electrification, and sanitation facilities to the communities. In communities where the houses are too far from each other, the response of the *municipio* is to gather the people in *centros poblados*. As a result, the provision of basic services is conditioned, in some communities, on people "gathering" into small villages, far away from the *finca* – effectively solving the issue of cost provision raised through the water conflict in Samona (chapter 6). I heard for the first time about the plan of the *municipio* to build a *centro poblado* in the community of Vicente Salazar during a conversation between Juan Manuel and Javier, on the little table (where I was sitting… observing, and waiting) at the back of Juan's house in Tiputini. Juan explains to me: 'The idea is: "you want the basic services, then *agrúpense* [gather]!" Because the *municipio* is not interested in small contracts. They want big contracts, to be able to steal a bit of money.' But 'this is not respecting the Quichua culture', Juan considers. 'People should be given access to the basic services in the place where they live! And there would be solutions which do not cost too much'. Javier chimes in: 'in those populated centers, they limit your territory. You fart and the neighnour can smell it'. And Juan goes on: 'the people do not want to live in those places. It's in the plan and that's all'. 'If we speak of development, Javier adds, things have changed here but very slowly. Same if we speak of *rescate de la cultura*.' 'The issue is that we have a Mayor who does not understand the

[579] Conversation 25/01/2017.

concept of culture, Juan concludes. He doesn't care. I need people who understand your culture to be able to know how things should be done.'[580]

The plan of the *municipio* for the community of Vicente Salazar gave me an excellent pretext to discuss and investigate people's perceptions of the city, and the village, as opposed to the community. This final empirical chapter analyses such perceptions, in a context where the *municipio* plans to gather the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar as a condition to provide them with the electricity while some of the inhabitants argue they should go to the city to live and find a job. I show that while most people describe the 'village' as boring, noisy and polluted, and compare it to the city where they complain you need to 'pay for everything' and 'work every day', some young people explain they would happily leave their land to go to the city if they had money and a job. Such heterogeneous and ambivalent perceptions are again illuminating of (both remaining and) changing values of the *finca* – which are analysed more directly here (than in previous chapters) as the relationship with the *finca* is directly 'threatened' by the prospects of gathering and moving to the city. They are also telling of people's perceptions of money (and paying), wage labour, and the good life among the communities, and this firth and final empirical chapter comes as a summary of the empirical story – as it confirms many points raised in the previous chapters which I summarise in the discussion.

It confirms, in particular, the tendency at play in the *ribera* towards more disconnection, by adding a fifth form of disconnection from nature – in space, in addition to the disconnection in time and values (chapter 7), the pollution generated by the oil project (chapter 5) and the external and internal pressures on the subsistence economy (chapter 4). It thus comes as another illustration of the inevitable disconnection from nature (in time and space), in the name of development (in this case access to electricity) and despite the struggles such disconnection

[580] Conversation 17/11/2016.

triggers – ultimately leading to a local crisis and a situation of poverty. The chapter concludes with some considerations of the future of the communities in an oil development context and shows that the challenge is to design alternatives to development beyond the recurrent dilemma between 'difference' and 'equality' which is at the heart not only of the oil extraction project but all the stages of the capitalist and modern development it inevitably comes with.

The chapter proceeds in four stages. I first introduce the community of the Millennium of Pañacocha which provides a concrete illustration of such tendency in the *ribera* (as well as other themes of the previous chapters) and gave me another very concrete opportunity to discuss the prospect of gathering with the inhabitants. In a second section, I analyse people's perceptions of the city and the village as opposed to the community. I discuss, in a third section how such heterogeneous and ambivalent perceptions are again illuminating of (both remaining and) changing values of the *finca*, but also money, wage labour, and perceptions of the good life among the communities, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of alternative futures for the communities of the *ribera* (in a fourth section).

This chapter is based, again, on my conversations with the inhabitants of Vicente Salazar but also and when relevant, with people from the neighbouring communities – Puerto Miranda, inside the ITT block, and Samona in particular, ahead in the oil development process. I also travel, physically and in time, to Pañacocha (further up the river), and to the imagined futures of the inhabitants of the Lower Napo River, through their own accounts and narratives. Contrary to the previous chapter where the perceptions of the young were analysed indirectly (through the comments and observations of their elders), I now discuss with young people from those communities directly as a way to undersand their perceptions, aspirations and values.

1. Pañacocha, the community of the Millennium

All the basic services

The project of the *municipio* in Vicente Salazar is not without precedent in the *ribera*. The community of the Millennium, built by PAM in the community of Pañacocha, is a concrete example of such tendency. I visited Pañacocha on various occasions, several times on my way to Coca [the *turno* stops there every day for their passengers to grab some lunch, in two small *comedores* of the community] and once for a longer stay. Situated about 4 hours boat from Tiputini, halfway through between Tiputini and Coca and in front of the community of Samona (on the other side of the river), the village was built as a *centro poblado* where the inhabitants were relocated in cement houses (63 houses of 96 meter-square each, built over 14.5 hectares), in a different place from their previous houses and *finca* [see figure 47]. Inaugurated in January 2014, the 23-million dollar project is the second community of the Millennium in the country (after Playas de Cuyabeno) and the first one of the *ribera*. Each prefabricated house counts with two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom, and contains all the basic services (tap water, toilets and shower, gas and electricity) and more (internet, phone and TV for instance). The houses are evaluated at 60,000 dollars each, and the inhabitants pay a monthly tax for them. During the inauguration, Correa famously said: 'misery should not be part of the folklore, poverty can be overcome without destroying the cultural potential' (Cevallos, 2014).

The village is interesting, among many other reasons, insofar as a many house (approximately half of them) are unoccupied. Another interesting feature of Pañacocha is that its inhabitants, who were given jobs in the oil company at the same time as they were provided with the new houses, no longer have jobs since the prices of oil plummeted. They now have problems paying for the houses and services – as a young man from Pañacocha told me[581].

[581] Conversation 26/10/2016.

Figure 47: Pañacocha, the first Community of the Millennium in the *ribera*, January 2017





Source: the author

Half of the houses are empty

Everyone in the communities around Tiputini has an opinion on Pañacocha and the reasons why some inhabitants do not want to occupy the new houses.

For Franco and Carmina, the reason is that the inhabitants did not want the services. They tell me, in an interview: 'in Pañacocha, they say that there are people who live there and people who don't live there, some of them don't like to use the toilets, they don't like to bathe in the shower, they prefer to jump into the river and be in peace' When I ask if they would personally like it, they say: 'As one is here too…' 'close to the *pueblo, algo apartados* [a bit pulled apart]…' '*Para todos no es lo mismo el cambio* [Change doesn't mean the same to all of us]'.[582] This is, however, an exception: there is a consensus in the communities that it is good to have access to all the basic services, and I very rarely heard they might be undesirable.

[582] 26/01/2017.

Luciano, president of Puerto Miranda, explains the empty houses by the fact that, as in Samona, the people did not want to pay a tax: 'they thought the government was giving for free. *Vivan*! And they wanted to *adueñarse* [take it]: it's my house… they didn't realise they had to pay a tax. And so, then they didn't like it, and many of them walked away to their *finca*. (…) They don't like it, it's that… because they say they give them the light, with television, with internet, with phone, everything, and so… all of this you have to pay a tax, every month (…) when they first had to pay they got scared! For that reason they left the houses dumped.'[583] He emphasises, however, that it would be fine paying for such services as long as one has a job. 'There, you need to pay a monthly tax, he tells me. You need to find a job, and work, and pay monthly…'. 'It's good, as I tell you, but with a job. In order to… pay this tax. They give you the internet, there is light, everything. The water, everything there!'[584]. Luciano also thinks that the people did not want to be relocated far from their *finca*: 'Because the people here, we are used to living in the *finca*. And they don't want to live in the *pueblo*. Some of us, we are used to living in the *pueblo*… others in the *finca'.* When I ask him whether he is used to the *pueblo,* he says he likes the *finca* too: 'because at least I can plant [crops]. In the village there's nothing to do. (…). For that reason the people in Pañacocha say that the houses are empty there. This is what they tell me.' [585] Being far from the *finca* is a third common reason people give to explain why a few people in Pañacocha have refused to live in the houses built by the government (and decided to stay in their *finca* instead). This was confirmed by the same young man in Pañacocha, who explained to me that while the young are happy to have everything in the new houses – he precised: internet, TV, and phone – some people, elderly notably, preferred to stay in their *finca.*

[583] Interview 17/01/2017.
[584] Interview 17/01/2017.
[585] Interview 17/01/2017.

Lessons from Pañacocha

The situation of Pañacocha, the responses of its inhabitants to the double change (gathering as a *pueblo* and entering wage labour) as well as the perceptions of these responses by the people of the lower part of the river all confirm various points and tendencies explored throughout the empirical story. One is the heterogeneity, ambivalences and changing perceptions of the inhabitants surrounding the commodification of life in the communities, the role of money and jobs, and the values of the *finca* as a place and as an activity. On that first point, the comments of the inhabitants of the lower part of the river above indeed confirm the idea that basic services are desired and rarely seen as culturally disruptive per se (as explored in chapter 5), while the inhabitants may refuse to pay for them, but at the same time might agree to pay if they have a job (as explored in chapter 6). They also introduce the main theme of this chapter, which has to do with the changing and remaining values of the *finca* and the struggles associated with the idea of living far from it – to which I now turn in the next section.

A second aspect has to do with the apparently inescapable tendency towards commodification, wage labour and disconnection from the *finca*, this time in space, as a common feature of the prospect of the communities – whether it is gathering as a *pueblo* or moving to the city – and accelerated in an oil development context marked by the provision of basic services, in spite of such ambivalences, struggles and heterogeneities.

A final one has to do with the prospect for the inhabitants in an oil development context in which jobs will no longer be abundant – which is likely to be one of dependency and crisis as the company leaves the territory (which is described in chapter 7).

2. The village, the city and the community: remaining and changing values of the *finca*

While the relatively recent transformation of the community of Pañacocha, further up the river, is a recurrent topic of discussion and debate in the communities, there are many other good occasions in the *ribera* to discuss the inhabitants' ideas about 'the village' and 'the city'. Indeed, the themes of 'city life', of the contrast between the village and the community, and of 'gathering' are very topical in the communities – especially in Vicente Salazar, given the plan of the *municipio* to relocate the inhabitants in the centre of the community. Moreover, while some people have lived in the cities of Coca or Quito and like to recount their experience and the reasons why they came back to their community[586], others go regularly to Coca. Some *socios*, notably from Vicente Salazar and Santa Rosa, have experienced village life in Tiputini – where they sometimes have a second house (because of a job in the *municipio* or because of their children's education) or where they go on a daily or weekly basis, for shopping and *tramites*. Finally, some inhabitants are a mix of all the above. While the most common feature people focus on when comparing Quito to the communities is the climate [Quito is 'cold' while the Amazon is 'warm'], more telling are the contrasts in terms of space, pollution, noise and boredom. The same words are used to compare the village, Tiputini, to the community – the former being described as crowded, boring and noisy. The inhabitants also frequently describe the city as a place where you have to pay for everything, hence where you have to work every day, while the community provides everything for free. Those accounts are interesting insofar as they are often directly telling of people's relationship with the *finca* – through its opposition to the city and the village, where there is no land and there is no space –, but also with money and wage labour. They highlight, in turn, how (changing) values of the *finca* shape (changing) values of the city, village and community. They are ultimately illustrative of people's conception of a good life and the (changing) role of the *finca* in their ability to lead such a life.

[586] I heard many of those stories though casual conversations, and later through more formal interviews.

There is no space in the village/city, it is boring, noisy, and contaminated

The opposition between the village/city and the community is often framed in terms of activity: because there is no *finca* in the city/village, it is perceived as boring. Noa tells me: '*en el pueblo no me enseño* [I don't enjoy myself in the village] [referring to Tiputini]. (…). My daughters want me to go to Quito. But *yo no me enseño* [I don't like it]. Here I'm clearing my yard, I'm in peace. On the other hand, there no. There is nothing to do. There it's only eating and watching TV. Very boring. I don't like it.'[587] At the end of the interview, that day, he adds that he will plant plantain trees later this morning: otherwise, he gets bored. Belén, who has a second house in the village, Tiputini, similarly explains that she never gets bored in the community – with the chicken, plantations, *finca* and cleaning. On the other hand, she tells me, 'there is nothing to do in the village'[588]. Edgar also considers that 'Tiputini is boring because there is little vegetation', and that 'life is better in Santa Rosa'[589]. This view is shared by Carmina, who says: 'personally, I am here because we have our business here [her husband sells fruits and meat in a small shop in the village], but I prefer to be in the *finca* where I don't hear anything, and I can focus on what I have to do with my animals, on the other hand, here, I am mostly watching TV, heated, I eat, I sleep and I get sick. Because I fell off my motorcycle I am sick now'.[590]

As illustrated by Carmina's comments, the village is also seen as crowded and noisy. Another common framing of the opposition between the village and the community has to do with space: in the village, where the people are gathered, there is no land and no space for cultivations – as was a common reason people gave to explain why a few people in Pañacocha have refused to live in the houses built by the government and decided to stay in their *finca*

[587] Interview 2/11/2016.
[588] Conversations 10-12/11/2016.
[589] Conversation 19/10/2016.
[590] Interview 26/01/2017.

instead. This aspect is similarly stressed by Franco, who declares: 'I don't like it either. There's so much noise. In my house with the family I like wearing only underwear, because of the heat. But in the village they look down on you'. His brother, Gaspar, complains about the *bulla* [noise] of the nightclub in Tiputini: 'Before we lived silently, now there's *mucha bulla* [much noise]. In the village, the *bulla* of the nightclub, of the motors. Of the oil workers, (…) The *bulla* is never-ending. Here in the country, one can rest!' The city, in the same way as the village, is often described in terms of noise and pollution. For instance, Karla, the operator of the plant in Samona, who comes from the Quichua community of San Roque and lived in Coca and Quito for many years, tells me: 'I used to reject the community, but now I reject the village. I get sick when I go to Coca. All those cars, those motorcycles, the noise, I just can't!'[591]. On the contrary, 'in the community, you have tranquillity. You walk quietly. It's safe too'[592]. Finally, the city is often perceived as being incompatible with 'freedom', especially by the elderly. For instance, León explains that his parents stayed to live here because they did not want to live in a city: 'they wanted to be free'[593].

The finca as a provider of livelihood

During my stay at her house in Puerto Quinche, Belén tells me: 'my husband [a *mestizo* from the province of Morona Santiago] doesn't want to stay here if we don't become *socios*. But I tell him: "look, here we don't pay for anything. We cultivate all we eat, everything is free. And we can take advantage during the time the company is around!"'[594]. And Manuel and Carmen's grandchildren, a boy and a girl of about ten years old who live partly in the city of Coca with their mum, partly in the community (Yanayacu) with their dad, explain to me that they prefer to live in Yanayacu 'because the food is free, and the cities are dangerous'[595].

[591] Conversation 30/11/2016.
[592] Collective conversation Vicente Salazar 4/09/2016.
[593] Interview 11/11/2016.
[594] Conversations 10-12/11/2016.
[595] Conversation 18/12/2016.

The *finca*, in addition to its intrinsic value, is also the main source of subsistence for the inhabitants, and still provides most of the food consumed in the communities (as detailed in chapter 4). And a recurring pattern in the inhabitants' description of the community is that if you work (the *finca*) you will have enough to sustain yourself – a framing which was already visible in the discussion of poverty in chapter 4. When I asked my interviewees in Boca Tiputini whether they would like to live in a city, they often pointed to the absence of land in the city, resulting in the need to pay for everything. Mauricio prefers not to live in a city because 'there it's only money and here there's *tierra* [land]'[596]. This view is echoed by Maribel[597], who 'does not like [the city either], because you need a lot of money (…) well, for instance, here I have my yucca, my herbs, but in the city one needs to buy [them] with money!'. Antonio's wife, who knows Coca well, shares the same opinion of the city: 'I did not like it, and I came back. I feel bored, it's not like here. There, everything is buying. There, no one gives you a glass of water, you can die of hunger. (…) here, on the contrary, you go, you walk around, and people give you *chicha'*[598]. Interestingly, what is valued here in the communities is exactly what Gaspar and Javier argue is changing with oil extraction and jobs (see chapter 7).

It was not entirely clear whether the main issue for the inhabitants of Boca Tiputini was the idea of paying for food, or if it had more to do with their inability to sustain themselves in the city because of their lack of money. Some young people told me explicitly that they would happily live in a city if they had enough money.

Ulises and Lorenzo, two young brothers from Puerto Miranda, explain to me that they are trying to accumulate enough money to buy what they need, such as their own piece of land outside the community. They later add, 'At some point, we do want to leave the community. This is

[596] Interview 24/11/2016.
[597] Interview 25/11/2016.
[598] Interview 24/11/2016.

destiny'. When I ask whether their parents share the same opinion, they reply: 'No, they prefer to live and die where they lived'. I ask them why this has changed, and they answer: 'For the new generation. To live in a city. To change. How can I explain? To know the outside, change one's trajectory. One's idea. It's like that, for the new generation.' 'But the issue in a city like Quito, the other young man adds, is that you have to pay for everything. It's cool on the one hand, but on the other it's not. Here, we eat what we produce, but in Quito no: you need to buy it with money. If you don't have money, you can't eat anything. So you need to be rich.' They both conclude that they would like to live there if they had enough money[599]. In the same vein, in the centre of Samona, two young men recount to me their experience in the capital city: they went to a random *comedor* and 'got charged 18 dollars for a breakfast for two people!' They had seen the menu, but without the prices. (…) They don't want to live in Quito, they say, because there, you need a lot of money. But if it wasn't for money, they add, they would like to live in Quito. One of them adds: 'it's very nice, very different from here.' The other one chimes in: 'it's good for the climate. Here it's too warm.'[600]

These young men do not reject the idea of living in a city per se, but they are perfectly aware that they could not sustain themselves in the city. One could conceive that the slow disappearance of subsistence activities such as cultivating, hunting and fishing could be compensated by money, especially if the *fincas* are reduced to their role of food and money provider. Such view, which could potentially be espoused by some of the younger generation, resonates with Javierita (quoted in chapter 7), who believes that in the future, people will pay for what they no longer have time to produce themselves. In other words, they will either buy food and beverages in shops, or from other places where people still have time to hunt, fish, cultivate the land and prepare meals. This prediction comes from Javierita's personal

[599] Interview 2/09/2016.
[600] Conversation 1/12/2016.

experience. She has a daughter in Coca, who also has children. And as it is a village there, they only buy. She says it pains her, 'because there, they only buy'. 'The grandchildren no longer go hunting or anything, she adds, because there is nowhere to. It's pure village, houses. It could happen here too, maybe. And then we need to buy from other places which might have hunting. To be able to eat.'[601]

Working every day

In such case, again, the lack of money would leave the inhabitants with only one option, if they want to sustain themselves in the city: working every day – because, as emphasised by a young man from Yanayacu, 'If we do not cultivate, what can we live from? If you go to the city you will have to find a job, because just like that, living out of theft *no puede ser* [is not possible]'[602]. Like many other people in the *ribera*, Gaspar had opportunities to go abroad[603], notably when he fell in love with a woman from Guayaquil. She wanted to take him there, but he said no 'because in the city, you need to work every day. Otherwise you don't eat.'[604]. Jakelin similarly finds that it is 'more difficult' to live in Quito because 'there you need to work every day'. She used to work there, in construction work. She now lives in Tiputini and goes every day to the community [Vicente Salazar] to work in the *finca*, for a couple of hours. She says she likes it better[605]. This echoes the struggles associated with wage labour described in chapter 7. As expected, given the difficulties people face when working for the oil company, the idea of 'working every day' is not attractive to most of the inhabitants. But again here, some of the young have a different perspective on jobs versus agricultural work.

Carmina's son, 18 years old, is one of them. As we paint a bunch in Vicente Salazar, during the monthly *minga* of the community, he explains to me that he does not want to stay here

[601] Interview 31/10/2016.
[602] Interview Valentín 17/12/2016.
[603] Meaning *a fuera de la ribera*, outside the river.
[604] Conversation 31/10/2016.
[605] Conversation 31/10/2016.

because there are no jobs. 'And what am I going to do if I don't have a job?' He asks. I ask him if he does not like cultivating. '*Casi no mucho* [almost not much]'. Contrary to the elderly (Noa for instance, who gets bored when he is far from the *finca*), he says he gets bored when he cultivates. He would prefer an 'easy' profession, he tells me. I try to dig a bit into what he means by 'easy'. 'For example, in an office', he responds. He tells me he lived in Manabí (a city on the west coast of Ecuador) to study and liked it a lot: 'the education was better. And I liked the city.' But he could stay here too, if there were jobs. He doesn't really mind where he is, as long as he has a job. He concludes that he would like to work for the oil company[606].

Poverty in the city or poverty in the community?

While moving to the city might arguably be desirable for the young, the prospects for them are not likely to be brighter given the low levels of primary and secondary education in the *ribera* which, as I came to understand through my conversations with the inhabitants and the oil workers, was a great obstacle for the young to succeed when sent to university, outside the *ribera*. For Achacaspi, the capuchin priest, such lack of education would be detrimental to obtain a job in the city. Moreover, as he puts it: 'even when they manage to study, there are no jobs for them. Because of too much racism. They always feel like they are the last wheel of the car.'[607] As a result, prospects in the city for the Quichua inhabitants of the Lower Napo River are likely to result in poverty. In the end, and if the expectations of the inhabitants displayed in the previous chapters are confirmed in the future, oil development in the *ribera* is likely to only offer, in the long term, a dilemma between poverty in the community and poverty in the city.

[606] Conversation 18/09/2016.
[607] Interview 24/02/2017.

3. Summary and discussion

Summary

Whenever describing their life in the village or in the city, their perceptions of Pañacocha, or the prospect of gathering as a *pueblo* or moving to the city, the inhabitants stress that it is boring (because of the absence of the *finca* and animals), noisy and polluted. In addition, because of the absence of the *finca*, the city is described as a place where you need to 'pay for everything' as opposed to the community where you can obtain food and water for free, from the land and river. As a result, the city is also a place where you need to 'work every day' – salaried work in the city is contrasted with the work in the *finca* which is sometimes described as freedom. These framings are coherent with the resistance to the idea of paying and working (wage labour), displayed by the inhabitants in the two previous chapters. But while the idea of 'paying for everything' seems to be a problem per se for the inhabitants, some young people frame it as a lack of money issue and explain they would happily leave their land to go to the city if they had money and a job. This is not without reminding us of the way the water conflict in Samona is reframed by the inhabitants in the lower part of the river. Carmina's son even tells me he gets bored when he cultivates – unlike his elders, who get bored when they are far from the *finca*. He will not stay in the *ribera* if there are no jobs, and would think of moving to the city in order to find one. While moving to the city might arguably be a desirable prospect for the young, it is likely to be a prospect of poverty. Indeed, given the absence of university in the *ribera* as well as the low quality of primary and secondary education, the prospects of finding a good job are low. They are even lower when one takes into account the racism which exists in the country. All in all and considering the prospects in the *ribera* in the aftermaths of the oil extraction project (which I examined in the previous chapter), the inhabitants are likely to face a choice between poverty in the city or poverty in their own communities.

Discussion

People's perceptions of the village and city shed further light on the values (and changing values) of the *finca* – more explicitly so than in the previous chapters – as well as money, wage labour, and perceptions of the good life among the communities. Indeed, whether 'gathering' in the centre of the community, living in the village, or moving to the city, resistance and reluctance is about the *finca* (since gathering means almost inevitably being disconnected – in space – from the *finca)*. The different uses and values of the *finca* were already the focus of the previous empirical chapters. In chapter 4, I described it as the main provider of food and money and described its 'insufficiencies' regarding the latter. In chapter 5, it was threatened by oil (pollution), but people considered they could move to another part of the territory and maintained that the *indígena* never abandons the *finca*. In chapter 7, I showed that people tend to neglect the *finca* as they have a job, because of time constraints (jobs) and changing values (money). It is interesting that the *finca* is perceived as much more threatened by the 'urbanisation' of the *ribera* (disconnection in space), which comes as a response to the costs of basic services provision, than by the pollution from oil, for instance. And as the *finca* is threatened, it becomes very clear that it retains multiple values in the communities (a source of livelihood and cultural identity), in spite of the 'insufficiencies' described in chapter 4.

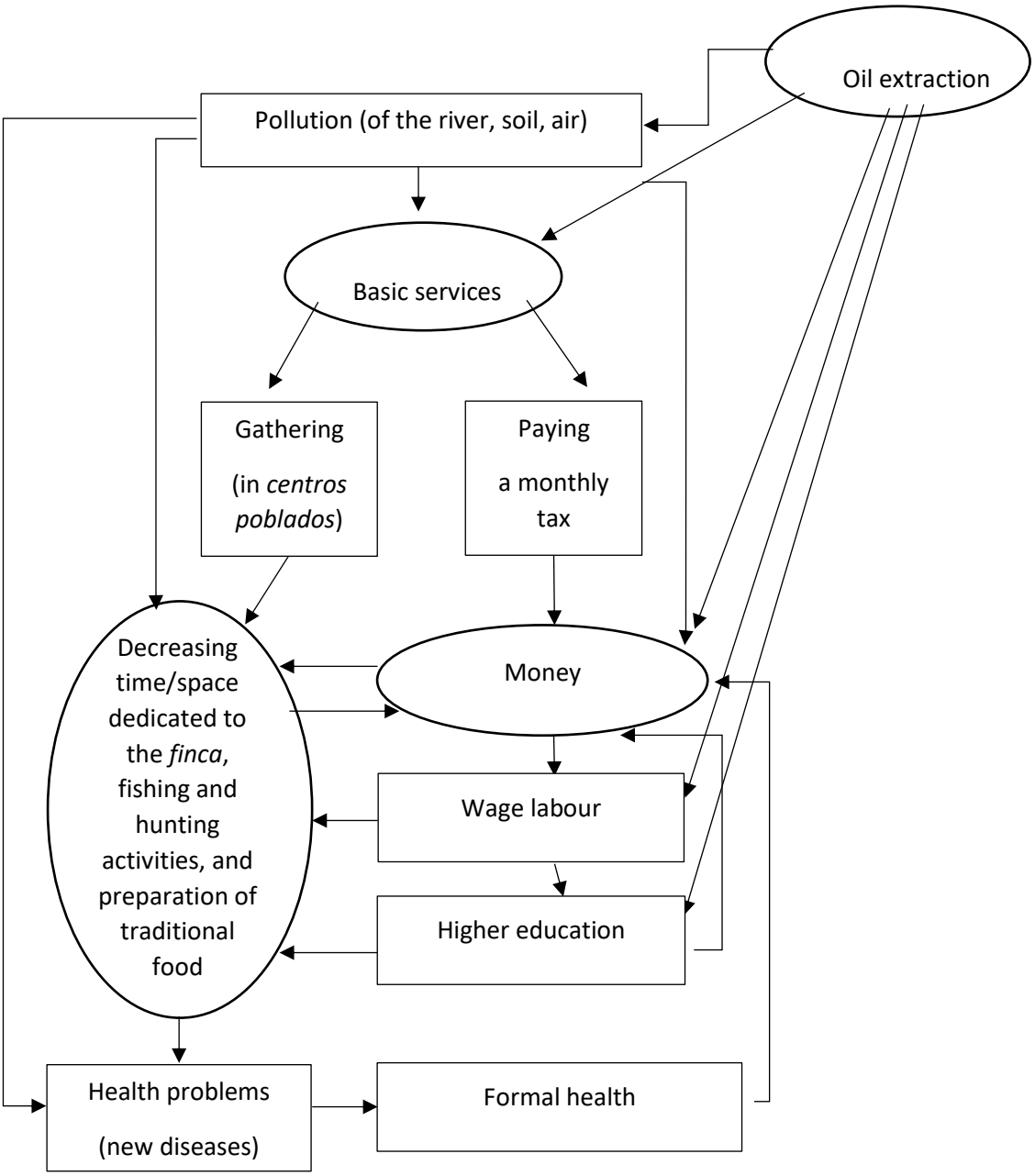
All in all, in the face of a dilemma between accessing the services and staying in the *finca*, the perceptions and responses of the inhabitants are heterogeneous – and the fact that half of the houses in Pañacocha are empty illustrates such heterogeneity. Beyond the heterogeneity and ambivalences which are found in the communities, there is a clear tendency towards a decreased importance of the *finca* (as a place and as an activity). It is illustrated, this time, by the accounts of some young people who seem to find the prospect of living in the city more attractive, and who also want to work (wage labour), while reframing their inability to move there as a matter of lack of income – rather than resistance to the idea of 'paying for everything'.

According to Achacaspi, the priest, the young would not mind selling the lands today, contrary to their elders[608]. The changing values of the young towards the *finca* and agricultural activities appear much more clearly here as well (compared to chapter 7) – as the prospects of 'gathering' or moving become concrete, and as I discuss such prospects directly with them.

At a second level, the chapter sheds light on the idea that oil and basic services seem to inescapably lead to a disconnection from the *finca*, not only in time (as observed in the previous chapter), due to changing values and due to the pollution, but in space as well – regardless of the inhabitants' stance on such disconnection. Indeed, the inhabitants, however much they value agricultural activities and the *finca*, also desire access to the basic services, in a context where there is a clear tension between obtaining the basic services and working the land. This tension comes from the 'technical solution' (gathering) which is found to the issue of 'costs' issue of basic service provision in large territories (visible through the water conflict in chapter 6) – in the same way as wage labour came as a technical solution to the 'lack of income' problem – and it is exemplified by the community of Pañacocha, where the houses including all the services were built far from the *finca*, or even Samona, the territory of which is split by the river, where only half of the community (the one on the left bank of the river, where the *centro poblado* is situated) has access to the drinking water (while electricity network only reaches some five houses in the centre). All in all, the chapter illustrates, once again, the inevitability of change (in the form of disconnection from nature, in time and space) in the name of development and despite the struggles and tensions change comes with, resulting in the weakening of already weakened subsistence economies. The flowchart below seeks to illustrate the process described in the 4 last empirical chapters, in an oil development context.

[608] Interview 24/02/2017.

Figure 48: Oil extraction and the gradual weakening of the subsistence economy[609]



Source: the author

From an oil extraction and MCA perspective, these accounts inform us again and further on the indirectness, long term and unpredictability of the impacts of oil extraction (at the moment

[609] This flowchart illustrates the different mechanisms underlined in my conversations with the inhabitants (most of which come from chapter 7, section 4) as a way to help the reader follow all the different ramifications which are described in the empirical story.

a collective decision is made regarding entrance of the oil company), when it comes to people's 'cultural difference', that is, their relationship with nature – with a focus here on the use and value of the land and agricultural activities as a source of livelihood and cultural identity. They also show, again, that the biggest 'impacts' come from the 'benefits' (here again basic services provision) rather than from the 'impacts' of oil extraction.

The chapter finally touches, at a third level, on the prospects of the inhabitants after oil (more normative) – and a likely choice, at the end of the oil project, between poverty in the city and poverty in their own communities.

4. Alternatives futures for the inhabitants of the *ribera*

A conversation between a biologist, a priest, a sociologist, an oil worker (and anthropologist), an indigenous student of anthropology, a Quichua man from Vicente Salazar and a councilman

One day I asked Juan, somehow provocatively: 'They might become *pueblos*… but what's the alternative? You can't give them all the basic services for free?'. He replied (and repeated): 'Yes you can [give them all the basic services for free]. They have that right, as native people. This is in the Constitution, they must not pay taxes. The Mayor *desconoce* [ignores] the law, and he *desconoce* their culture too'[610]. Juan has his own idea of how to provide the basic services to the Quichua communities, without charging them and without having them gather around a centre: his ideal view of the future of the communities, which he discussed with me a couple of times, involved education (the people who come to do research – like me – would have to teach as well), communitarian tourism (it would be organised and funded by the *municipio* and would give the people jobs on a rotating basis, which would be embedded in and compatible with their Quichua life), and all the basic services for free – and financed

[610] Conversation 24/01/2017.

through communitarian tourism. Juan would also tax all the boats entering the Napo River (including the oil company) in order to finance tourism further.

According to Javier and Juan (the conversation from the introduction goes on), and as Juan reiterated many times during my stay, the main obstacle is that the Mayor does not understand the Quichua culture and does not care about it either. For Juan, 'everything is *políticas* [politics] in this country. We need a *política* made of the people, activists and environmentalists. [We need] A Mayor who loves the environment, who loves his people, and who acts accordingly.' [611] Javier compliments: 'The problem is that here, the ones who talk about politics are from outside, and they don't know the reality of here'. But another, even bigger issue, in his view, is that 'The ones who know it [the Quichua people] don't talk about politics'[612]. He goes on, later in a conversation: 'As I was telling you before, *cualquier pelucón* [in this case, any *mestizo*] comes here to say whatever, and because he's from outside, we believe him. I was telling the Manaba, from the shop [the owner of the shop is from Manabí, a city on the west coast of Ecuador]: I am going to buy a boat, to go and sell my fruits in Coca. And he told me: 'no, sell them to me and I'll take them to Coca for you!' It's always the same! They want to smash us! I told him: "no, I'll do it myself"'[613]. What Achacaspi, the priest of the *ribera*, considers a cultural disease, of the soul' [the supposed superiority of the *mestizo*[614] and a 'terrible dependency'[615]] is, for Daniel, a sociologist working for the FAL, a puzzle to be investigated. 'It could be an indigenous canton!' he tells me. 'They could have an indigenous Mayor. But it doesn't happen. There is no discourse of anti-*mestizo* domination in the *ribera.*'[616]

[611] Conversation 30/10/2016.
[612] Interview 8/11/2016.
[613] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[614] In his own words: 'If the *mestizo* exploits [oil], exploiting must be good'.
[615] Conversation 24/02/2017.
[616] Conversation 25/02/2017.

According to Javier, 'They have taken us our ways of living a long time ago: the hunting, the fishing, because of the very state: the MAE, the MAGAP, *Socio Bosque*. They are changing us already'. For him, the main threat to the culture today is 'of losing the idiosyncrasy: the power of deciding what we want by ourselves'[617]. Humberto, a sociologist who works for the oil company, concurs: 'We all suffer because we are looking for a Paradise, be it economic, intellectual, emotional, etc. which we do not know how to reach. It is even worse for them because they are not even sure that they need these things that they are searching, and which, in the end, we have imposed on them.' And when I first met him in the Colombian *comedor* of Tiputini, Emilio, an anthropologist (and priest) working for PAM, was equally critical towards the oil activities: 'what we are doing is cultural invasion. We are taking their resources, and we impose our western view on them. Through TV, more than anything else. (…) We try to minimise the environmental impact, but the truth is that we don't know what to do ourselves [to address this issue]. It's a question I ask myself personally, and I don't have the answer. You, with your PhD, you'll find more questions than answers.' For him, 'What they need is education. Without education, you cannot value what you have'[618]. He goes on, in an interview: 'The cultural shock is huge, but the only legitimate way of empowering them is to give them that tool, the education. For them to be able to decide on their future.' He goes on: 'We want all of them to have an interest. Maintaining their ways of living, improving their living conditions, their abilities to be able to decide of their future by themselves. We want them not to be dependent on us, but to make their own development. (…) They need to decide if they want to get integrated or not. The more we can give them is to tell them that they can handle their future. For instance, it's better to have everything here, for people not to have to emigrate to make a living of their business, etc. (…) but it's for them to decide.'

[617] Interview 8/11/2016.
[618] Interview 8/11/2016.

In his view, however, 'The problem is that the people here don't feel able to move forward with education.' This is something I heard repeatedly in the *ribera*. According to Ismael, an elderly Quichua man from Samona: 'My people, we don't know how to think. Nobody understands what happens and how. So: welcome state and oil companies!' 'I always tell the young people: if we do not study, we are dead! Find a way to train yourself technically. But also: we are not serious enough to study. We don't like commitment. We are weak to study. And there is no money to go and study.'[619] Lack of money and lack of confidence are two obstacles for the inhabitants to study, as also illustrated by Javier's story. One of the most educated Quichua person I met during my 8-month stay in the *ribera*, he started university in Coca at the age of 30, financing his studies himself, by working[620]. He could not finish because of lack of money. He tells me: 'Before I went to university, I was just another ignorant from here. There, I realised that I did represent a response for this society. But at the beginning, I personally felt inferior.'[621] Another issue with education, as suggested in the thesis, is that it collides with the Quichua culture in many ways (the language, the use of time, people's values and relationship with the land and the community, inequalities, etc.). As a result, in Javier's view, 'Personally, the goal now for my children is for them to achieve what I haven't achieved: *prepararse* [get educated], but without losing the culture.' As it is made clear in the empirical chapters, the 'culture' Javier is referring to has nothing to do with hunting and fishing or living in a typical Quichua house (see chapter 4). 'I speak Quichua. This is it, more than anything else. When we lose the language we'll lose the culture.'[622]

For David Romo, a biologist who works in the Tiputini scientific station, the biggest impacts from oil are the ways it changes the dynamic of the local inhabitants – while according to him

[619] Interview 19/12/2016.
[620] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[621] Conversation 8/12/2016.
[622] Conversation 8/12/2016.

we could learn how to control and mitigate the direct impacts from oil on the environment. He thinks the solution lies in intercultural education: we are only giving them the worst of capitalism; we need to give them the best too. He believes this has not really happened because of 'lack of love, and care': no one, according to him, has had enough love and care for those people to really try and help them. He believes, as a result, that the Quichua people will probably have to 'get lost' (in the city) before they understand what they have lost and return to the forest[623]. According to Gerardo, the difficulty is much broader than oil extraction (or intercultural education). There is an opposition today and a contradiction between progress and the indigenous culture, exactly because from the beginning, progress and technology did not incorporate the indigenous cosmovision. Because of this contradiction, indigenous people remain poor, since any kind of development which is offered to them goes against their culture. The worst of all, according to Gerardo, is that indigenous people themselves do not know anymore what they want, and what they need. Which kind of development would be good for them. Which kind of development would not be incompatible with their cosmovision.

A young Quichua man from Saraguro, who studied anthropology in Canada, Gerardo himself does not have the answer. Because there was never that space, for them to be able to conceive and build it, inside of this society. So many ideas were imposed on them that some people have simply lost their cosmovision. In my own view, this is also why post-development theories are so flexible in content, and undefined. No one has the answer. For Gerardo, the white cannot find the solution, because they do not share such cosmovision. If they want to protect nature, it is always for their personal benefit. Gerardo gives me an example: if you want to protect the sea it is because you enjoy swimming in the sea, not because you understand and respect the value of the sea. [I did not fully agree with Gerardo then, and I only disagree more today – as is apparent in the conclusions]. The indigenous people, by discussing with their elders and

[623] Interview 21/03/2017.

debating, might be able to find something, but they need the white to give them the space to do that. Although the white cannot understand everything, they do have the power and influence to open/create that space, or to close it[624].

I realised, that day in December 2016, while discussing with Gerardo, that this was exactly what Juan Manuel was doing in the *ribera*. Juan was finally elected as the Mayor of Aguarico in May 2019.

Figure 49: Sunset on the Napo River



Source: the autor

[624] Conversation 23/12/2016.

Conclusions. Coming back from the *ribera*: 'We are all Quichua and capitalism is a big oil company'[625]

In the theoretical chapter I argued that for political ecology and ecological economics, one way to create alternative, more sustainable societies [in response to the ecological crisis which is a crisis of capitalism], is to replace existing decision-making tools by more democratic ones which would be able to take into consideration different groups, hence different values, which are not always commensurable. One of the main underlying assumptions is that while some groups of people (in this case indigenous), due to a 'cultural difference', have more 'ecological' values than other groups, the power imbalance embedded in traditional decision tools (monetary) prevent their values from being taken into account in policy decisions. If they were given more power, they would help reverse current unsustainable decisions.

The situation in the Lower Napo River of the Ecuadorian Amazon shows a different picture. The empirical chapters describe, one by one and step by step (chronological), the inevitability of the entrance of the oil company in the *ribera*, together with a modern and capitalist form of development, despite the tensions and conflicts that each stage of incorporation triggers. These struggles are analysed as the reflection of the ambivalences of the inhabitants towards a form of development which is both seen as desirable and necessary while it is in tension with many aspects of community life and subsistence livelihoods. The chapters analyse the valuation struggles created by such dilemma, while at the same time arguing that the entrance of the oil company and its acceptance by the inhabitants is inevitable – and inevitably leads to the weakening of already weakened subsistence economies and an ecological crisis at the local level of the *ribera*. This becomes clear when one looks at the penetration of oil in the *ribera* as a dynamic and embedded process [across time and space].

[625] Field notes 13/01/2017.

In this final chapter, I reconceptualise the frameworks of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts in the light of my empirical story and derive implications in terms of the search for solutions to the ecological crisis which is at the heart of the project of ecological economics. I show how the investigation of oil decisions in time and space allows understanding the responses and struggles of indigenous people who, despite a special attachment to the environment as a source of livelihood and cultural identity, incommensurable with money, accept environmentally disrupting projects in their territory in the name of 'equality' and against their own cultural 'difference'. I show, in turn, how such understanding can illuminate theories of conflict in political ecology. I finally argue that ecological economics, if it is to be coherent with its own premises and if it is to address some of the problems raised by political ecology, will have to go beyond the current strategy of tackling the decision tools in order to find solutions to the ecological crisis. In particular, if the trade-off created by modernity and capitalism is the problem, then the design of different tools to make decisions within the same trade-off cannot possibly be the answer to the crisis.

1. Inevitability of oil penetration, development and change in the Lower Napo River despite the struggles: summary and discussion

Oil as an asymmetric dilemma and the inevitability of acceptance: a chronological summary

As the empirical story shows, growing pressures on the subsistence economy in the communities, prior to the entrance of the oil company (due to the pollution of the river, increased scarcity of animals and controls from the state on hunting and fishing), coupled with a changing conception of 'poverty' which is increasingly equated with subsistence livelihoods by the inhabitants themselves, mean that the inhabitants rely more and more on money and state provision to fulfil their needs – most of which remain unfulfilled due to the relative scarcity of both in the region. The oil extraction project enters in this context with further impacts on the river, forest and land (thus on people's livelihoods) but also with the desired

money and jobs and, crucially, with a 'social compensation' which is frequently used to provide drinking water to the communities – where the pollution of the Napo River is not only the main expected consequence of the new oil extraction project, but a long-standing ecological and health issue, mostly unaddressed by the state. As the provision of drinking water slowly transforms the inhabitants into wage labourers (working for the oil company in order to pay for them) and, in some cases, their communities into small villages (gathering in the centre as a condition to obtain the 'basic services'), people are slowly disconnected, in time and space, from agricultural activities and the *finca* – in addition to the direct pollution from the oil project. Pañacocha, the Community of the Millennium built by PAM in the *ribera* is a concrete illustration of that tendency in the *ribera.* Disconnection becomes partly endogenous as people's valuation of the *finca*, as a place and an activity, evolves. It finally translates into a crisis when, after some years of seismic activities, the oil company no longer needs unqualified workers from the communities, leaving the inhabitants in the same 'limbo' described at the beginning of the process, this time with more unfulfilled needs and an ever-weakened subsistence economy. At that point, some inhabitants contemplate the possibility of migrating to the city and find a job, which is again a source of dilemmas and struggles due to the remaining (and changing) values of the *finca* and agriculture. And while moving to the city might arguably be a desirable prospect for the young, it is likely to be a prospect of poverty. All in all, oil extraction in the Lower Napo River might result, in the long term, in a choice between poverty in the city and poverty in their own communities for the inhabitants.

Oil as a provider of development itself damaging of nature and humans

In the Lower Napo River, the oil extraction project enters in communities marked by a double scarcity (in nature and money) to provide the inhabitants with the benefits they consider they need and are asking for prior to the entrance of the oil company, but also with further impacts on the environment with consequences in terms of people's livelihoods, while some of the

benefits from oil can ‘compensate’ for some of the impacts as well as long-standing ecological problems in the communities – as the example of drinking water illustrates. The biggest impacts come from such compensation, that is, from the benefits from oil extraction which are also the benefits from modernity. They are indirect and long term and have to do with the changing values of the inhabitants regarding the use of the environment as a source of livelihood and cultural identity. In order words, they have to do with people’s very ecological and cultural difference as defined by political ecology. They finally result in an ecological crisis at the local scale of the *ribera*, which is also economic and social, as the company leaves the communities.

MCA translation (: oil as an asymmetric dilemma)

From an MCA perspective, the thesis shows that if oil represents a dilemma, it is a rather asymmetric one where oil comes to further already existing ‘impacts’ while providing the communities with ‘solutions’ for the consequences on people’s livelihoods of both the new and existing impacts on the river – in addition to money, jobs and other ‘benefits’ which are considered to be lacking and necessary prior to the entrance of the company. On the other hand, the benefits from oil are often the main trigger of ecological and cultural change in the communities, indirectly and in the long term, starting with drinking water provision which disconnects people from nature in time, space and values, in addition to the direct pollution from the oil project. All in all, oil comes to accelerate a process of change (economic, ecological and cultural) already at play in the communities, by providing the inhabitants with the benefits they increasingly need and desire as a result of that very process of change.

2. Implications for political ecology and ecological economics

Understanding compromise

As many "mutually exclusive alternatives" of development imposed by others on indigenous people, through which they have to choose to be either hunters and gatherers or 'civilized' (Blaser et al., 2004: 27), oil extraction and the social compensation it comes with deny the 'life projects' of indigenous people. In Escobar's vocabulary, they deny 'difference-in-equality'. According to Esperanza Martínez, the investments realised by the public firm follow a mechanism of blackmail: 'Rights cannot be negotiated. If we search, they all repudiate oil. They had to renounce to an ideal'[626]. But while in such cases, Martinez-Alier and Escobar expect people to oppose oil extraction, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that indigenous people might accept arrangements which they see as denying their 'difference' while they provide them with what Escobar calls 'equality' (2008). At one level, the case of the Lower Napo River allows understanding such possibility – without dismissing people's agency and without denying the constraints within which such agency operates.

The acceptance of oil extraction and the cultural struggles it comes with cannot be understood independently from the broader process of change in which oil is embedded in the *ribera*, the timeframe in which decisions are made and in which the impacts and benefits from oil extraction come, and people's daily lives. Indeed, as the study of such process makes apparent, responses to a changing context are not only determined by people's values: they are about valuation at one point in time. If such valuation is not independent from values, it embeds other considerations such as, in the present case, the state of the communities, the needs of the inhabitants and the alternatives available to fulfil them, but also the timeframe in which the different indirect consequences of every change occur. In addition, people's values are

[626] Acción Ecológica, Interview Quito August 2014.

constantly shaped and negotiated in the process of change, in turn shaping and influencing this very process. The situation of the Lower Napo River thus suggests that ecological and cultural 'difference', rather than fixed and essential, is both fluid and contextual and might be reframed in its encounter with extractivism and development projects which, in their modernist and capitalistic expression, are necessarily in tension with the alternative uses and values of nature which sustain subsistence livelihoods. This is what the static view adopted by political ecology does not allow us to see. Indeed, the asymmetry between the impacts and the benefits and the changing values of the inhabitants become visible only as one looks at oil decisions in a concrete, embedded, and dynamic way. This also explains why MCAs might not give the right answer in this context.

Reframing and expanding political ecology (to include the study of 'non-conflicts')

The struggles of the Quichua people of the *ribera*, in turn, shed light on the fact that political ecology could gain much explanatory power by studying oil decisions as a dynamic process, that is, by allowing values to change and by recognising that valuation at one point in time is not the mere translation of values but includes considerations of needs and available possibilities to fulfil them, timeline of the costs and benefits and interdependences between the two. This would allow the frameworks to understand and consider the choice of indigenous people who, despite a special attachment to the environment as a source of livelihood and cultural identity, incommensurable with money, have accepted an environmentally disrupting project in their territory in the name of 'equality' and against their own cultural 'difference'. By doing so, it could become an illuminating theory of 'non-conflict'. For Engle, "right to culture claims, when successful, threaten to limit the groups that might qualify for protection" (2010: 13). In her critique, this is a default of International Law which focuses on cultural rights while leaving aside the question of economic and social equality. But this could well apply to the frameworks of ecological and cultural distribution conflicts which, by describing

opposition as the direct implication of 'difference', could implicitly prevent indigenous people who do not oppose oil extraction (and other environmentally damaging projects) from being considered as part of the ecologically and culturally 'different' group of people under study. This is important in a country like Ecuador, where, by giving the right to free, prior and informed consent to indigenous people, the state will prevent any criticism on the ground that they misperceive the impacts or are imposed a decision – even though, in the end, oil extraction is a decision of the Ecuadorian State (De la Cruz, 2005; Finer et al., 2008; Simbaña, 2012). The risk is that people who vote in favour of oil extraction in their territories or enter into compromises are seen as 'greedy opportunists' (Van Rooij, Lora-Wainwright, Wu, & Zhang, 2012), or simply denied the support of environmental and human rights organisations – as it happened in Ecuador when communities signed agreements with the oil companies.

It is also important in a context where the number of non-conflictive, yet problematic situations, might increase as the result of three tendencies: 1) the exponential degradation of the planet, which means nature is increasingly limited in its role as a source of livelihood for many indigenous people around the world, 2) indigenous people being increasingly integrated to the market (Alvard, 1993; Kuper et al., 2003; Redford and Stearman, 1993; Lu, 2007) but often lacking access to basic services, as is the case in the Amazon region (Bustamante, 2007), and, finally, 3) the multiplication of progressive governments in Latin America, notably in extractive countries, which makes the possibilities of attractive compromises between states and indigenous communities more likely.

In particular, following Engle, "the assertions [of cultural rights claims] appear unsustainable (…) few indigenous groups can live up to the cultural purity and ideal that the state and its non-indigenous citizens have come to expect in the bargain" (2010: 14). In Ecuador, while the Quichua are probably more acculturated than any other indigenous group (Holt et al., 2004), the majority of indigenous communities present some degree of market integration, which often

results in mixed economies (Lu, 2007). And in the Amazon, where pollution is sometimes already a daily reality, where basic services are lacking (Bustamante, 2007), and where poverty rates are higher than in the rest of the country[627], the cost of oil extraction could be seen as minimal compared to the benefits it brings.

For Rival, "the Ecuadorian government continues to try to avoid trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and oil development by attempting to 'buy' community consent to the drilling of additional oil wells with social development packages" (2015: 26). The important fact here is that the strategy might be efficient: as Fernandez-Marti argues, Quichua communities in Ecuador "perceive small steps done to improve their life quality" (2012: 22)), contrary to leading organizations such as the CONAIE. As a result, the fact that extractive activities are increasingly concentrated in indigenous lands (O'Rourke and Connolly 2003) does not necessarily mean that the number of open conflicts will increase in the world, as is often assumed by political ecology (see for instance Anguelovski, 2014; Martinez-Alier, 2014). Hence the importance of not marginalising the struggles involved in situations of non-conflict.

Rethinking solutions: alternatives for difference-in-equality beyond the dilemma

While a better understanding of the contemporary struggles of indigenous people in the face of change is valuable in itself, it also has important political implications. What is made clear throughout the empirical chapters is that no matter what the Quichua people of the *ribera* aspire to for their future and people, they are at the receiving end of already established processes which only offer a choice between their different, incommensurable, needs, values and rights, rendering them empirically contradictory and incompatible. Thus, in the process of (both inevitable and desired) encounter with state institutions, globalisation and modernity, and progressive (but inescapable) integration to the Ecuadorian society, the Quichua people of the

[627] In 2010, poverty rates in the Amazon were 71% against 45% at the national level (Inec 2010).

ribera seem to be left with no option but 'voluntarily' embracing compromises and solutions which drive them further and further away from their culture and identity – because, as the empirical story shows over and again, 'remaining' (resisting change) is not a realistic option once the process of change is triggered. The valuation struggles of the inhabitants in the face of oil extraction are ultimately symptomatic of wider struggles, in the face of development which, in its modernist and capitalistic expression, is systematically in tension with ecological and cultural 'difference'. It follows that the response to such struggles does not seem to lie in the design of new decision-making tools (such as MCAs), which would allow a better choice between various alternatives which are not satisfactory anyway. Instead, as Rival argues, "One of the biggest policy making challenges in the 21st century is to create opportunities so that people need not renounce their identities in order to have access to the full range of social and economic possibilities" (2015: nd). In other words, the most pressing and urgent task is probably to design alternatives to development which would go beyond the recurrent dilemma between development ('equality'), on the one hand, and the preservation of culture and the environment ('difference') on the other hand, systematically faced not only by a growing number of indigenous people around the world, but by the human species as a whole, in the context of an unprecedented ecological crisis. Indeed, and as Eric Beinhocker concluded his talk on the "New economic and moral foundations for the Anthropocene", in June 2019 in Oxford: this is a trade-off that 'needs to be broken because we need to be here [on this planet]'. And there is no model for this: 'we need to invent one'. The task, which probably requires thinking out of the box about questions of rights, 'difference', 'equality', and endless number of related concepts, goes way beyond the scope of my thesis. I conclude this chapter with some suggestions for further research, beyond the *ribera* and beyond indigenous people.

3. (‘Us’ and ‘them’) The ecological crisis as a crisis of capitalism and modernity and contemporary challenges of ecological economics beyond the dichotomy

As one goes deeper into the origins and premises of political ecology and ecological economics, and in particular their diagnosis of the current global ecological crisis, it appears that many authors consider it as a crisis of capitalism, inherently damaging of nature and humans and built on the modern divide nature/culture[628]. From there, one can recontextualise the reasons why those authors logically conclude, from such diagnosis fuelled with further assumptions, that indigenous people are the ‘carriers of alternative societies’. Among these assumptions, a crucial one concerns the ‘cultural difference’ of indigenous people – implicitly assumed to be anti-modernity and anti-capitalistic, but also fixed and tied to groups of people. My empirical research, because it questions such assumption, calls for a reconceptualisation of the frameworks of political ecology in order to rethink the proposed solutions of ecological economics to the current, global and unprecedented, ecological crisis. In particular, it calls for a discussion and reframing of two main central concepts of the frameworks: ‘difference’ and ‘cultural’. This can be done by revisiting and reconciling three bodies of (interrelated) literature, at the crossroads between anthropology, philosophy, political economy, political ecology and ecological economics: 1) a relatively recent literature on Marxism and ecology, with a particular focus on the role of the relationship between men and nature in Marxist analyses of capitalism, 2) the modern divide between nature and culture, which is presumably the root cause of the ecological crisis and thus crucial to understand it, and 3) the recent anthropological discussion of ‘culture’ versus ‘ontology’, which also goes back to philosophical discussions around the concept of knowledge.

[628] See Descola (2005) and Hornborg (2001) for the modern divide as the root cause of the ecological crisis.

Redefining 'difference'

Following a Marxist analysis of political economy (see Burkett, 2006; Foster, 2015; Foster, 2000; Saito, 2017; Saroja Sundararajan, 1996) (which both political ecology and ecological economics are consistent with) and, in particular, considering the capitalist system as a historically situated inversion of the natural unity between humans and nature (Wolff, 2003), a strong case can be made that the 'special relationship with nature' that some indigenous groups have maintained (both in worldviews and practices) should not be understood in terms of an essential 'difference' but rather as a fundamental aspect of our common human nature, which has been distorted in some places[629] and has the potential to be distorted everywhere[630]. 'Difference', then, becomes contextual and fluid rather than essential: it is not about different people but different levels of 'disembeddedness' (Hornborg, 2001). From there, and beyond the pervasive dichotomy between 'us' ('moderns') and 'them' ('indigenous') (Graeber, 2004; Hornborg, 2001), common needs and struggles might indicate the way towards alternatives to development[631] which would not entail the recurrent dilemma between progress and ecology which threatens to distort the natural unity between humans and nature all over the world.

Engaging with 'culture'

If the modern divide is the problem, then worldviews which are not built on a separation between nature and humans surely are of paramount importance in the design of such alternatives. From there, the question of how we treat, study and even name these worldviews becomes a crucial one. This leads me to the recent discussions in anthropology about culture, ontology, and knowledge (Blaser, 2014; Povinelli, 1995; Yates, Harris, & Wilson, 2017).

[629] Leading to a global ecological crisis but also, according to Saito (2017), to economic, social, health and mental health crises in the West.
[630] As it is happening as a global trend: see Hornborg (2001)
[631] It is worth mentioning that such alternatives already exist in theory and under different names – such as communism, difference-in-equality (Escobar, 2006a), post-development or *buen vivir* – but no clear content.

Drawing on Hornborg (2017) and Graeber (2015), in particular, one can argue that although the ontological turn undertook a necessary shift in wording from 'culture' to 'ontology', it still arguably portrays worldviews as cultural constructions worth preserving for their own stake. What we need, instead, is to critically engage with such worldviews; by considering them as different and valid ways of seeing (or different aspects of) an 'objective, not-fully knowable, unique reality' (Couvreur, 2018) – certain aspects of which the 'modern' picture and worldview is blind to. This is exactly what the ontological turn does not do; and is consistent with the premises of ecological economics which 'accepts the existence of a reality independent of human cognition' (Spash, 2015: 36).

Knowledge and the role of academia

While it makes no doubt that the social sciences, and more particularly anthropology, have a central role to play in the uncovering, exploration and discussion of alternative worldviews and forms of knowledge, Moeller's discussion of the meanings of indigenous and traditional knowledge in the Ecuadorian Amazon (2017) suggests, in my understanding, that the kind of knowledge which will be most relevant to deal with the ecological crisis, contrary to the scientific one ('know what'), is about 'know how' (experience). The difference between the two is best illustrated, according to her, by the idea that 'when one reads a book on the Amazon, one only knows the book, not the Amazon'. It is also the difference between *conocer* y *saber* (curiously both translated as 'to know' in English). A third component of such project should thus revolve around a discussion of the respective roles of academia (both in understanding the theoretical challenges at play and in documenting alternative worldviews) and other forms of knowledge (including which form they might take and how they can be experienced, learnt and shared between human beings and sometimes across different 'worlds'), in creating alternative realities (including sustainable alternatives to the modern development project), beyond the

current and pervasive dilemma between development and sustainability[632] – an arguably urgent task in the face of the 21st century's ecological crisis.

[632] For Burkett (2006), the 'sustainable development' paradigm is only about 'sustainable capitalism' – that is, maintaining a state of crisis of human development without a break with the capitalist system.

Appendix I: “Convenios de indemnización y compensación social con comunidades del área de influencia directa del Proyecto BLOQUE 43” [basic services highlighted]

OBRAS DE COMPENSACIÓN SOCIAL COMUNIDADES B-43 - INFRAESTRUCTURA 2015-2017				
BLOQUE	COMUNIDAD	CONVENIO	OBRA / COMPROMISO	MONTO INVERSIÓN
43	Chiro Isla	O-01834-PAM-EP-2015	PAM EP se compromete en financiar los estudios técnicos de factibilidad y construcción de un proyecto de agua segura en beneficio de aproximadamente 90 familias de la Comunidad de Chiro Isla	USD 1,200,000.00
43	Chiro Isla	O-01834-PAM-EP-2015	Construcción de una tienda comunitaria en base a los estándares de PAM EP	USD 75,790.27
43	Chiro Isla	O-01834-PAM-EP-2015	Apoyos educativos a 2 bachilleres de la comunidad que participen en cursos de nivelación de Preuniversitarios.	USD 2,000.00
43	Chiro Isla	O-01834-PAM-EP-2015	Financiamiento para que 6 bachilleres de la comuna participen en los cursos de nivelación como preparación para rendir las pruebas del ENES, aprobar su ingreso a universidades estatales se destinaran 3 apoyos económicos para estudios universitarios y 3 apoyos para estudios de tecniologías de carreras de libre elección.	USD 14,000.00
43	Chiro Isla	O-01834-PAM-EP-2015	Entrega de 1 canoa de fibra de vidrio de 36 mtrs,con 2 motores de 200 hp	USD 80,000.00
43	Chiro Isla	O-01834-PAM-EP-2015	Incluir a la comuna dentro de los programas de desarrollo comunitario a traves del PRC	USD 8,000.00
43	Sinchichicta	O-01648-PAM-EP-2014	PAM EP en conjunto con la CNEL elaborara los estudios y la ejecución del proyecto de electrificación en la Comuna Sinchichicta Cari para 55 familias, de acuerdo a las especificaciones técnicas que tiene CNEL para los sectores rurales del Cantón Aguarico. PAM EP financiara estudios y construcción del proyecto, bajo estándares de CNEL	USD 894,584.92
43	Sinchichicta	O-01648-PAM-EP-2014	Item 3.6 PAM EP incluira a la comuna sinchichicta en los programas y proyectos de desarrollo comunitario de acuerdo al PRC de PAM EP	USD 16,000.00
43	Sinchichicta	O-01648-PAM-EP-2014	Capacitaciones SECAP	USD 8,000.00

43	Puerto Miranda	O-01527-PAM-EP-2014	Elaborar los estudios y gestionar los recursos economicos ante Instituciones competentes para la Construccion de un Sistema de agua para consumo humano de 19 familias de la COMUNIDAD / Estudios consultoria etapa final	USD 15,000.00
43	Puerto Miranda	O-01527-PAM-EP-2014	Construcción y equipamiento de un infocentro de acuerdo a estándares de PAM EP. La COMUNIDAD gestionará el servicio de internet/ conectividad CNT	USD 2,000.00
43	Puerto Miranda	O-01527-PAM-EP-2014	Construcción de un muelle peatonal para la COMUNIDAD, en la rivera del Rio Napo, según estándares de PAM EP/ va Carpinteria Artesanal en lugar del muelle	USD 95,000.00
43	Puerto Miranda	O-01527-PAM-EP-2014	Otorgar cinco (5) apoyos educativos para estudiantes de nivel superior de la COMUNIDAD, de acuerdo al programa de Relaciones Comunitarias de PAM EP	USD 5,000.00
43	Puerto Miranda	O-01527-PAM-EP-2014	Apoyar con cinco (5) cursos de capacitacion para la COMUNIDAD	USD 18,000.00
43	Puerto Miranda	O-01527-PAM-EP-2014	Proyectos agropecuarios	USD 20,000.00
43	Puerto Quinche	O-01856-PAM-EP-2015	Financiar la_construcción del proyecto de agua potable y las unidades básicas sanitarias de acuerdo a los estudios realizados por el GADMCA para 96 familias en Puerto Quinche que habitan tanto al margen izquierdo y derecho del rio Napo, proyecto que será ejecutado con el gobierno autónomo descentralizado Municipal del Cantón Aguarico, proyecto que se iniciara en el 2015	USD 1,200,000.00
43	Puerto Quinche	O-01856-PAM-EP-2015	Capacitaciones SECAP	USD 5,000.00
43	Puerto Quinche	O-01856-PAM-EP-2015	proyectos agropecuarios	USD 48,000.00
43	San Vicente	O-01675-PAM-EP-2014	Elaboración del estudio de electrificación y ejecución del proyecto en la Comunidad para el abastecimiento de energía eléctrica a 44 familias, que viven en los dos márgenes del Rio Napo	USD 731,933.12
43	San Vicente	O-01675-PAM-EP-2014	Reparación del sistema de agua y batería sanitaria del área escolar, ubicada en el centro poblado de la comunidad: Mantenimiento de la torre, tanque de reserva y tuberías, rehabilitación de las instalaciones y piezas sanitarias tanto para	USD 24,542.83

43	San Vicente	O-01675-PAM-EP-2014	Reparación del sistema de agua y batería sanitaria del área escolar, ubicada en el centro poblado de la comunidad: Mantenimiento de la torre, tanque de reserva y tuberías, rehabilitación de las instalaciones y piezas sanitarias tanto para varones y niñas, pintura de las instalaciones de baños (paredes y estructura metálica) y habilitar las instalaciones de agua y grifería del fregadero	USD 24,542.83
43	Boca Tiputini	O-01647-PAM-EP-2014	Construccion de un infocentro equipado con 10 computadoras,un impresora scanner , 10 mesas, 10 sillas, un escritorio, un anaquel y un aire acondicionado/Conectividad CNT	USD 2,000.00
43	Boca Tiputini	O-01647-PAM-EP-2014	PAM EP en conjunto con CNEL elaborara un proyecto de electrificación en el Centro Yanayacu para 26 familias, de acuerdo a especificaciones técnicas de CNEL para los sectores rurales del Cantón Aguarico. PAM EP financiara los estudios y la construcción del proyecto	USD 241,522.12
43	Boca Tiputini	O-01647-PAM-EP-2014	Apoyar con el financiamiento para la adquisición de una gabarra con capacidad de 300 toneladas, para lo cual se nombrara una comisión conjuntamente con la Comuna que se encargara de definir las características y diseño de la misma	USD 700,000.00
43	Boca Tiputini	O-01647-PAM-EP-2014	Construcción de una caminería peatonal en el perímetro de la plataforma ZESC, para uso de la comunidad.	USD 37,692.71
43	Boca Tiputini	O-01647-PAM-EP-2014	Capacitacion temas administrativos	USD 5,000.00
43	Boca Tiputini	O-01647-PAM-EP-2014	Proyectos agropecuarios	USD 33,000.00
			TOTAL:	USD 5,482,065.97

Source: "OBRAS DE COMPENSACIÓN SOCIAL COMUNIDADES B-43 - INFRAESTRUCTURA 2015-2017", elaborated by pam and dated 5/09/2016

Appendix II: *Indemnización*

RESUMEN CONVENIOS INDEMNIZACIÓN BLOQUE-43 (TT) - Septiembre/2016							
COMUNIDAD	No. FAMILIAS	No. HABITANTES	FACILIDAD DE PRODUCCIÓN A CONSTRUIR EN LA COMUNIDAD	ÁREA UTILIZADA (Hectáreas)	VALOR USD$ AVALUO DINAC	CÓDIGO CONVENIO INDEMNIZACIÓN / FECHA FIRMA	PRESIDENTE DE LA COMUNIDAD 2016-2017
CHIRO ISLA	106	560	DDV OLEODUCTO	27.60	$128,986.09	O-01817-PAM-EP-2015 12 / 03 / 2015	Sr. Jhon Avilés
SINCHICHICTA	38	190	DDV OLEODUCTO	30.30	$141,874.20	O-01557-PAM-EP-2014 25 / 08 / 2014	Ing. Verónica Condo
SAN VICENTE	52	260	DDV OLEODUCTO	34.50	$161,232.61	O-01675-PAM-EP-2014 13 / 11 / 2014	Sr. Rodrigo Cox
PUERTO QUINCHE	96	480	DDV OLEODUCTO PLATAFORMA TIPUTINI B-2	51.06	$270,985.43	O-01857-PAM-EP-2015 10 / 04 / 2015	Sr. Bruno Oraco
BOCA TIPUTINI	86	575	ZONA DE EMBARQUE, CPT, PLATAFORMAS TIPUTINI A y TIPUTINI C, CRUCES SUB-FLUVIALES,	110.83	$512,442.87	O-01592-PAM-EP-2014 16 / 09 / 2014	Sr. José Miguel Ajón
PTO. MIRANDA	19	95	ZONA DE EMBARQUE, DDV y CAMPAMENTO TEMPORAL	18.00	$134,399.27	O-01540-PAM-EP-2014 31 / 07 / 2014	Sr. Laureano Cerda
				272.29	$1,349,920.47		

Source: "RESUMEN CONVENIOS INDEMNIZACIÓN BLOQUE-43 (05-09-2016)"

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