Kitchen Chronicles and Crude Expectations: Understanding Everyday Life in the Upper Ecuadorian Amazon

Emily A. Babb
University of South Carolina - Columbia, eababb98@gmail.com

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Kitchen Chronicles and Crude Expectations: Understanding Everyday Life in the Upper Ecuadorian Amazon

By

Emily Babb

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with Honors from the South Carolina Honors College

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Approved:

David Kneas
Director of Thesis

Monica Barra
Second Reader

Steve Lynn, Dean
For South Carolina Honors College
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Thesis Summary:

My thesis examines the everyday life of my Ecuadorian, Kichwa host family in an attempt to better understand how, if at all, they interact with and think about oil companies on a regular basis. In this way, I attempted to supplement the current literature, which tends to focus on the large, contentious interactions between indigenous people and the petroleum industry. It was my hope to expand the understanding of their identities both within and outside the context of oil and to show the complexity of their relationship with petroleum companies.

Introduction:

For my thesis, I lived with a Kichwa host family in the northern Ecuadorian Amazon for three weeks. While there, I participated in their everyday activities, such as helping my host mom cook lunch, going with my host mom to pick up the kids from school, and going with the family to tend to their farm. I made notes of our conversations and their interactions with others and their land. I conducted this research within the context of thinking about populations in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The thesis particularly focuses on these populations in relation to the petroleum industry’s presence in the area. Common framings of oil in the Amazon depict it as a space ridden with conflict and showing indigenous people in strong, constant opposition to oil companies. Through descriptions of my host family and their lives in the region, I hope to complicate and challenge this simple understanding. Depicting aspects of their everyday lives shows that there are many important elements of their lives that cannot be represented with this traditional narrative. Moreover, it demonstrates their complex relationship with the oil industry and resistance towards being classified in terms of support or opposition to the companies. The thesis aims to help illuminate more intimate aspects of my host family’s identity and their relationship with oil, thereby expanding understanding of indigenous populations in these areas beyond what traditional narratives allow.

The subsequent literature review explores the context of oil, history of indigenous people in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and the importance of studying the everyday. It draws on scholarship to provide an understanding of the region and methods used in this ethnography, before narrowing the focus to descriptions of my host family.

Literature Review:
The Emergence and Consequences of Oil in the Ecuadorean Amazon:

In 1949, after thirty years of un成功 efficiently looking for oil in the area, the president of Ecuador said, “the Oriente (Amazon) is a myth” (Little 2001: 52). The government looked at the Amazon as a possible source economic gain, and when it did not prove fruitful in this way, it disappointed the government and resulted in its loss of worth. The region is a large portion of the country’s total land area and is home to many people, yet it was considered a “myth.” It’s existence was ignored and denied until it could prove its “worth” through economic gains. The country’s flag further illustrates this point. Its emblem symbolizes the coast and Andes, but it neglects any representation of the Amazonian region. The area’s importance was discounted and it was hardly considered a part of the nation until it was able to prove is economic value.

It was not until after Ecuador’s war with Peru, and its subsequent loss of land, and the discovery of oil in the Amazon that the government’s attitude towards the region changed. By 1960, Ecuador’s slogan was “Ecuador has been, is, and will be an Amazonian nation” (Little 2001:52), and with this shifted stance, the Amazon became a more integrated part of the country, as it had finally shown its value to the rest of the country. This attitude of only viewing the Amazon as an economic resource persists today, which affects policy and the lives of indigenous people living in this area.

Beginning in the 1960s, the petroleum industry began to boom in this region. With the discovery of oil in the Ecuadorean Amazon, the government largely determined how, where, and by whom it would be extracted. Originally, a national petroleum company was created, Ecuadorian State Petroleum Corporation (CEPE). This decision was a consequence of nationalism feelings throughout the country in the 1970s. In 1976, the military executed a coup and issued policies that made Amazonian oil fields as national security zones, which allowed armed forces to enter the area. Thus, a new, violent force was introduced to the area which affected the way indigenous people could interact with and protest the development of the industry. Despite the military turning power over to the public in 1979, they had greatly prospered from the three years they spent exploiting the area of its resources. Moreover, they continue to receive thirty percent of all state oil revenues due to a law passed under their dictatorship (Little 2001:103).
The early 1980s were marked by a global economic crisis, which began to affect the Ecuadorian economy by 1982. In an effort to control the crisis, neoliberal policies were implemented and by 1985, the first international bidding for exploration rights to potential petroleum-containing Amazonian areas was conducted. Six more of these biddings occurred over the next decade, and led to the auctioning off of 200,000 square-kilometers (Little 2001:95). The government claimed all subsurface rights in the country, which allowed them the ability to auction off this land, as they were giving rights to sub-surface exploration. Thus, despite international interests and investments in the area, the national government still considered Amazonian development and oil extraction a national project.

The government marketed petroleum development as beneficial to all Ecuadorians. They claimed all citizens would reap economic rewards through this type of development, though this was far from true. Corruption has surrounded the industry, and it disproportionately helped some people and areas of the country over others. People living in Quito and Guayaquil have profited and seen the emergence of a middle class; technicians are needed in the development and extraction of petroleum, which has allowed for the growth of a middle class. Yet, overwhelmingly, petroleum earnings are concentrated among a few and have actually widened economic inequality throughout the country; revenues are not evenly distributed but rather remain controlled by a wealthy elite (Little 2001:103). Indigenous people were particularly negatively affected by this development. They saw little of the economic profits, and their territorial ownership was not respected by the government or petroleum companies. A former president of Petroecuador, Luis Román said that indigenous land ownership was only considered in the company’s expansion insofar as it would lead to legal or social problems for Petroecuador (Little 2001:204).

The petroleum industry also lead to dramatic increases in immigration into the area. Oil companies developed roads to move their equipment and goods into and out of the region, and they also hired many non-native workers. The roads made it far easier for movement into the area, and the new jobs encouraged migration into the area as well. Moreover, other parts of Ecuador were experiencing pressure over land, so the government pushed migrants to the Amazon as a way of dealing with this problem. They negated existing claims of ownership by indigenous populations, and incentivized migration into their territories. These new immigrants are more truthfully viewed as colonists of the area. They largely entered the region with little
concern for indigenous people and their history and culture. Their presence dramatically changed the geographical landscape. Towns were developed to serve the needs of the new colonists and petroleum industry. Churches, stores, schools, hospitals, and other governmental buildings were created. Most importantly, however, as the number of colonists in the area increased, so did their power. New provinces, cantons, and parishes were created, and colonists often occupied the new governmental positions that came along with their creation. They tended to flood particular areas at a time, which gave them immense voting power. Governmental leaders, therefore, tend to serve their interests rather than that of indigenous people. Thus, the impacts of the oil industry extends beyond petroleum extraction; its presence resulted in a loss of power and land ownership for indigenous communities living in the region (Little 2001:110-120).

In addition to its social and political effects, the oil industry has dramatically affected the environment and health of people living in the region. Since 1972, more than two billion barrels of crude oil have been extracted from this region (Hurtig and San-Sebastian 2005). Petroleum extraction requires large uses of water and chemicals, which creates massive amounts of toxic waste. If not disposed of properly, this waste pollutes the water and soil. Companies in the area disregarded the laws governing proper disposal, using practices that would obviously lead to severe contamination of the area. They dumped over eighteen million gallons of waste water and left open pits of hazardous waste (Kimerling 1991). Moreover, through over 800 oil spills, about 16.8 million gallons of crude oil have been leached into the environment (Arellano et. al 2017). Such high levels of pollution lead to increased rates of cancer, nerve damage, skin disease, reproductive abnormalities, and many other health conditions (Sawyer 2004:102).

Texaco, a United States based petroleum company, was one of the companies extracting oil in the Ecuadorian region, and their area of extraction included the community I lived in for this thesis. In the early and mid 1990s, indigenous people living in this region filed an independent class action lawsuit against the company through the United States court system. This case was dismissed in 2002, however, on the grounds that they needed to sue the company in Ecuador instead. In 2003, a lawsuit was filed against Texaco, which had been acquired by Chevron in 2001, and judicial investigations began in 2004. Independent experts were employed to estimate damages, and by November 2008, a twenty-seven billion dollar fine was recommended. The oil company, however, allegedly lobbied the US government to end trade preferences with Ecuador due to these proceedings, and the judge was accused of misconduct.
Thus, a new judge was assigned to the case. In September 2010, estimated damages increased to between $90 and $113 billion. Yet, the judge ruled in 2011 that Chevron only had to pay $8.6 billion in damages and clean-up costs, although this would increase to $18 billion if they did not issue a public apology. After a series of legal battles within the country, including a ruling by the Ecuador Supreme Court, the judgement against Chevron was upheld.

At the same time that Chevron was appealing judicial decisions in Ecuador, they filed international appeals and lawsuits against Ecuador, claiming governmental influence in the judicial process, which was a violation of international law. The plaintiffs and Ecuadorian government sued the company in the US in an attempt to stop these international proceedings, but US courts ultimately allowed this act by Chevron. Through a series of appeals, the case against Ecuador made its way to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, which found Ecuador liable for “denying justice” to Chevron. Ecuador was ordered a $9.5 billion judgement against Chevron, and it was found that the verdict by Ecuadorian courts should not be upheld in any manner (Texaco/Chevron Lawsuits). These lawsuits show the global and national stakes involved in decisions of land ownership and environmental regulations in the Amazon. There are billions of dollars at stake, and for this reason, there is both national and international attention to the region and what happens in it.

The actions taken by Texaco during its time extracting oil in the region had undeniably dire consequences for the people living here. Studies from the late 1990s, show that some local communities had cancer rates thirty times higher than what is considered standard, contaminants in drinking water reached levels 1,000 times what is recommended by the U.S. EPA, and water in rivers near the oil camps had hydrocarbon concentrations 2,000 times what was considered tolerable for aquatic ecosystems. Oil oozed from the up from the ground (Sawyer 2004:103-104). These effects have large costs, both in terms of human life and in economic value. Their practices resulted in a loss of health and life for the people living in the area, and it also harmed the land. For indigenous people in these regions, land represents both economic revenue and subsistence. Its destruction results fundamental changes to their way of life, such as their ability to grow crops needed to survive and make money, which is also crucial to their ability to live. Thus, the lack of justice for indigenous people in the Texaco case indicates the oil company’s indifference for human suffering and a failing to indigenous people who were gravely affected and have seen no compensation. The power and wealth of companies invading the region
presents a challenge to indigenous people, as these businesses can pay for the best lawyers for decades at a time to ensure rulings in their favor. The ultimate ruling of the Chevron Texaco case demonstrates the power of these companies over indigenous people and sends a message against future challenges; not only did Chevron not have to pay damages, but they were awarded $9.5 billion.

**Indigenous Response to the Petroleum Industry:**

There are a few major indigenous groups that reside in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and each nationality has its own distinct territory. The Cofán and Siona-Secoya have smaller populations and live in the northernmost part of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The Quichua also live in the upper Amazon, but they have a larger territory and are generally are further south than the Cofán and Siona-Secoya. They also have a population in the Andes. The Huaorani reside in the upper Amazon and to the east of the Quichua. Finally, the Shuar are in the southern portion of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Figure 1). Indigenous nationalities each have a unique culture and leadership, and their relationships with each other are complex and sometimes involve conflict. Oil companies exploited these underlying divisions in attempts to suppress and invalidate indigenous voices.

![Figure 1 This map shows the distribution of indigenous populations in Ecuador (Sudo).](image)

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Different indigenous nationalities initially responded in different ways to petroleum company encroachments. The Cofane’s resistance grew over time as their lands saw increased levels of contamination. Although some worked for the oil company, Cofán were poorly compensated for the high levels of pollution and disruption they experienced. Ultimately, in the early 1980s, a group of Cofanes was forced to move in order to try to escape from the industry. The Quichua were at first receptive to this new industry, seeing it as an economic opportunity. Yet over time they, too, saw dire consequences of expansion onto their lands and pollution of their environment. The Siona-Secoya were initially minimally impacted by the industry’s growth in the area, and many worked for the company in its beginnings in the area. Yet over time, they, too, saw pollution and encroachment on their lands. Thus, while different indigenous groups had different experiences and initial interactions with the petroleum industry, nearly all nationalities began suffering the consequences of the company within a decade and began to resist its invasion (Little 2001:96-97).

Indigenous resistance to oil companies varied with time and space. Some of the most well cited examples involve large protests, occupation of petroleum wells, and the blocking off of key roads. For example, in April 1992, over 2,000 Quichua, Achuar, and Shiwiar people marched from the Amazon to Quito. They dressed in traditional indigenous clothing and wore face paint and feathers and carried spears. They made sure to highlight their indigenous history and culture by what they were wearing; images and videos captured of the march could not be mistaken as anything other than an act of indigenous protest. As they marched, indigenous people from the Andes joined them, and by the time they reached Quito, their group was estimated at 5,000 people. They demanded communal titling of two million hectares of land and changing the constitution to label Ecuador as a plurinational state. They demanded their voices be heard, and their two-week long march drew national and international attention (Sawyer 2004).

An interesting aspect of the protests is the unity among different indigenous nationalities. In the march of 1992, for example, the Quichua, Achuar, and Shiwiar joined together to communicate shared demands. They found greater power and strength through alliances in working against oil companies, and many different alliances were formed as a result. One such group is the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (OPIP), which was the organization Suzana Sawyer (2004) primarily chronicles in her book, Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador. Protests often lead to intense negotiations.
between petroleum executives and indigenous leaders. These meetings reveal important power dynamics and show the challenges indigenous people face in their struggle to be heard and have their demands met. Thus, Sawyer narrates meetings between ARCO petroleum company executives, government officials, and OPIP leaders. ARCO had found oil in the province and begun drilling its second well. This oil was located within indigenous territory, which led to the conflict between the company and indigenous groups discussed throughout the meetings described Sawyer’s book. The book helps to shed light on the intricacies of these larger moments of resistance.

In their resistance against ARCO’s invasion, several of the organizational alliances came together to fight against ARCO’s work, which marks the gravity of the situation. As the president of the Association of Evangelical Indians of Pastaza, Amazonian Region (AIEPRA) states at one of the meetings, “This rainy day in May is a historic occasion. Before, each organization struggled separately, independently. But now, we [indígenas (indigenous people)] realize that if we work individually we will never be able to advance...It is essential that we unite efforts. It is essential that we reach a consensus” (quoted in Sawyer 2004:132). Historically, indigenous groups have had intercommunity conflict. While this remained true even with the invasion of the oil companies, many indigenous nationalities chose to work together and unite in a way they never had before. They saw this as their only option for success. Any signs of division among indigenous nationalities was exploited by ARCO and shown as evidence for why they were not listening to indigenous people. During one meeting, an ARCO executive addressed conflicting opinions between indigenous groups with, “Disagreement over representation could, however, pose a serious obstacle to progress—that is to further dialogue” (Sawyer 2004:136). This ARCO executive threatened to cease all negotiations with indigenous leaders unless all nationalities could agree upon the same demands. Indigenous leaders have to present a perfect, unified front or they risk being dismissed. They are not allowed diversity of thought and concerns, despite different nationalities having different histories, experiences, and cultures. Thus, one single indigenous front being necessary in the plight against the industry shows both the severity of the situation and their struggle to be heard during these conversations.

Despite the indigenous people’s strong show of resistance, government officials worked with the petroleum company executives to give them the power in negotiations. For example, in one meeting, OPIP leaders told the government minister and ARCO executive that they had been
threatened and had their radios destroyed, which were there only means of communication, by Huaoranis, who supported and were supported by ARCO. They reported this incident to the police, and the person leading the assault was put in jail. ARCO then paid to have him released. Indigenous leaders assured the ARCO executive and government minister that they had proof of this transaction. The ARCO official vehemently denied this and the minister took to his defense, assuring leaders that intercommunity conflicts between indigenous groups was not a result of ARCO but rather ecological groups (Sawyer 2004:120-124). OPIP leaders denied these claims and provided evidence on the contrary, but the ARCO executive and government minister maintained a unified front and refused to admit any culpability. Thus, it is clear that both the government and ARCO were at the very least complacent to, if not directly involved in planning, violent attacks against indigenous people who served as a challenge for the oil industry. This shows how simply raising concerns and vocal opposition to petroleum companies results in verbal and physical threats. Indigenous people are not able to express any thoughts that contradict or threaten oil companies without fear for their and their family’s safety.

With the ARCO executive involved in these meetings being English and the indigenous leaders speaking Spanish but not English, an important language power dynamic emerged. A translator was used, but while the ARCO executive could understand Spanish well without the translator, OPIP leaders could not understand English. Sawyer describes the implications of these differing language abilities. “This slippage between comprehension and noncomprehension allowed the ARCO executive much leeway; language use symbolically paralleled imperialist desires. Despite translation, he often pretended not to understand or simply ignored statements, indulging instead in what appeared as self-righteous assertions” (Sawyer 2004:121-122). The ARCO executive could ensure that he understood and was understood; he had the ability to speak some Spanish if needed and get the gist of what indigenous leaders said even without the translator. OPIP leaders, however, relied on the translator. They could not speak English, which would have forced the ARCO executive to admit his comprehension and respond to their questions and concerns. The ARCO executive, therefore, held the power and extorted this differing ability. He chose what to respond to, and he intentionally ignored much of what OPIP leaders said. While OPIP leaders had meetings with ARCO executives and governmental officials, they were not given equal power and voice at these meetings.
Due to the uneven power dynamic, OPIP leaders described their meetings with the ARCO executive and government minister as, “unproductive bouts of intransigence and insults” (Sawyer 2004:130). Sawyer’s book does important work in highlighting this theme. She shows how these large moments of resistance by indigenous people are met by unfair, stacked petroleum and governmental responses. The Ecuadorian government tends to unconditionally support oil companies and petroleum industry executives extort all of the power they can.

Sawyer’s book, therefore, highlights how difficult it is for indigenous people to confront oil companies and have their voices heard. They are forced to form alliances and only present shared ideas. Petroleum companies have the support of the government and far more power in the relationship. Their power is shown through differing language abilities and the basic fact that these meetings happened in Quito. It was indigenous people who were burdened by the meetings in their long journey to attend them in Quito. This was a subtle way of showing them who held the power and the need for indigenous leaders to please ARCO executives but not of the executives to please indigenous leaders. Thus, negotiations between oil companies and indigenous groups present many obstacles for indigenous people to be heard, as even the most intrinsic elements of the meetings, language and location, represent immense power differentials.

Apart from just the oil industry, being an indigenous person living the Ecuadorian Amazon means always having your life disrupted by outside interference. Indigenous people have always had to navigate how to live their lives within these outside influences. Blanca Muratorio’s book The Life and Times of Grandfather Alonso: Culture and History in the Upper Amazon (1991) details this sentiment. The book chronicles the life of a Quichua elder, Grandfather Alonso, living in Tena, a city in the upper Amazon. As he speaks about his life history, it becomes apparent how much he and his community are affected by external interests. These outside groups include petroleum company executives, but it also extends to a history of rubber extraction, cattle farming, missionary work and gold mining. Indigenous people suffered great physical abuse from rubber extractors. They were kidnapped and forced to work, and there are even some cases of these extractors smuggling Ecuadorian indigenous people to Peru or Brazil, forcing them to work there (Muratorio 1991:110). Later, as the area saw a rise in cattle and cash crop farming, the foreigners coming into the area once again sought to extort indigenous labor. By the 1930s, the focus turned to panning for gold in the region. Once again,
indigenous labor was used. The outside powers bought gold from indigenous people at rates far below its true value. Muratorio specifies this, writing, “although the gold was bought from the Indians at only two sucres per gram, other goods were sold to them at the rate of nine sucres per gram” (Muratorio 1991:159). These various examples of extraction in this region, therefore, show the long history of indigenous extortion and unjust treatment. Moreover, Jesuit missionaries forced indigenous people to bury their dead in Christian graveyards rather than in their house; they were forced to change a deeply personal and spiritual cultural practice (Muratorio 1991:82). Thus, living in this area means subjection to violence, both physically and in the constant forced changes to daily life and cultural traditions.

Understanding this history is important in understanding indigenous responses to the petroleum industry. Throughout time, indigenous people have been subjected to external forces. While they certainly resist these forces, their relationship with them is complex. Such constant outside influence has forced indigenous people to find a balance of how to live within these externalities. Thus, resistance is not always as overt as large protests and occupations of petroleum sites. Sometimes indigenous people work with these outside forces, such as seeking employment from petroleum companies. Yet, those who have jobs with the industry are often in opposition to its presence. Grandfather Alonso recalls working for the community, “sometimes we had to protest to the company foremen because they made us work too much or wouldn’t let us leave when we wanted,” and he later continues with an example of a time he wanted to leave but was not allowed, “three of us were not allowed to leave. We sneaked into a canoe in the middle of the waves made by the hydroplane and we left” (Muratorio 1991:138). Petroleum company jobs presented economic opportunities that were not otherwise present in the area, and indigenous people therefore often seek these jobs. Yet, there is still resistance to the companies while they are working within them. Grandfather Alonso’s example shows how they did not just accept the company and its rules as they were given. They were willing to work for Shell, but they demanded certain working conditions. Thus, Muratorio shows a long history of complex relationships between petroleum companies and indigenous communities. This history demonstrates the need to think more closely of how people live in this region, as indigenous peoples’ interactions with foreign invaders, such as petroleum companies, is complex and cannot be fully understood through traditional narratives of clear, complete support or opposition to the invaders’ presences.
Indigenous relationships with the petroleum industry are complex and deserve to be understood more deeply than what is often told. The documentary *Crude* is one of the better known films about the petroleum industry in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The documentary presents indigenous people and the petroleum industry in complete opposition to each other. Watching the film, viewers are left with the impression that indigenous peoples’ lives revolve around the industry and are routinely engaged in protests against the companies. The trailer for the documentary opens with a Cofán woman singing about how her whole family has been killed as a result of the petroleum company’s presence and its contamination. Images of spilled oil, young children with cancer, and billowing, dark smoke coming up from the trees are shown. Indigenous people are shown traveling in buses and canoes to protest and holding signs and images during their protests, which is then contrasted by the military holding large guns in these areas. The film insinuates a state of constant urgency and danger felt by indigenous people in this region. It leaves viewers feeling like masses of indigenous people are dying daily from the company’s presence and that indigenous groups are constantly protesting the oil industry in the form of marches and occupations. If one were to only watch *Crude* and then visited the Ecuadorian Amazon, they would be surprised by the peace they found and lack of protests and conversations about petroleum. In truth, there are moments of large-scale resistance, such as is shown in *Crude*, but these moments do not dominate indigenous life.

It is important to recognize the larger, macro-level indigenous interactions with oil companies, but it is also crucial to understand their small, micro-level exchanges. Understanding both more accurately describes what is happening in the region and more truthfully depicts indigenous experiences. Not only do traditional narratives not align with what is typically found in the region, but they also create a dominate story about how people should behave, expectations of landscape, and expectations of how people should be viewing and reacting to the oil companies. People are forced to subscribe to these narratives, which suppresses indigenous individuality and voices; indigenous people must be careful how they present themselves in order to ensure support from their allies who expect this same narrative. Moreover, narratives such as those in *Crude* do not give space to discuss other important aspects of indigenous life. Studying the everyday allows recognition of indigenous identities and experiences outside the context of oil.
Thus, for my thesis, I describe the everyday life of my Kichwa host family, who live in the upper Ecuadorian Amazon. I describe everyday events and interactions, which aims to recognize indigenous identities and perspectives outside of the traditional narratives given. These descriptions are written by drawing on scholarship that has focused on the ideas of the everyday.

**The Importance of Studying the Everyday:**

Historically, social scientists have focused on the larger, macro, parts of social life rather than the smaller, micro aspects. In more recent years, however, traction has gained for the necessity of examining the micro-level details, too. This is commonly referred to as the “everyday.” The theory of the everyday highlights the importance of humans’ daily interactions with each other, spaces, and material objects. The importance of studying this aspect of human life can be described as,

“Everyday life is at the core of human existence. We walk, we talk, we dwell, we meet, we play, we pray. It is through these daily practices that we construct, perceive, and modify our world. In a typical day we are with our families, doing our work, and interacting with others in our community. These relational activities comprise the social fabric around which we create enduring individual and social memories and relate to others and the material world around us.” (Overholtzer and Robin 2017: 3)

Utilizing this method, therefore, involves the analysis of the seemingly mundane aspects of the everyday, such as word choice, ingredients used in cooking, and transportation methods used. These smaller facets of social life work together over time to create the larger, macro-level features often studied. Understanding the smaller details can help depict how and why the macro-level social life is as it is as well as give a different, fuller image of peoples’ social world.

Jessica Smith and Mette High’s article, *Exploring the anthropology of energy: Ethnography, energy and ethics*, helps further illuminate the need for an everyday approach. They state:

An ethnographic interest in, say, a family’s smart meter operations requires attention to the material and moral conditions that animate their usage, as well as the social and political environment that they spawn. Looking ethnographically at how people understand energy thus entails scholarly attention to these awkward scales that simultaneously escape, embrace, consume and construct the local. Ethnography thus
challenges our preconceived ideas and offers to take us on a journey that might be full of surprises. (Smith and High 2017:3)

In essence, individual small actions are powered by larger ideas, such as belief systems, external forces, and community relationships. Moreover, studying people on this level allows us to understand them as they understand themselves. These studies are rooted in what they experience and how they see these experiences. Some things may be important to communities that an anthropologist would not have assumed simply by studying macro-level social interactions and vice versa. Rather than learning about overall themes as a way to try to understand how communities are regularly impacted, this method allows the everyday to demonstrate what is happening in a larger context and the true attitudes of the people being studied. This ensures that what matters to local people is highlighted and that an accurate narrative of how local people feel about and are impacted by a given topic is created.

David Kneas’s (2018) Emergence and Aftermath: The (Un)Becoming of Resources and Identities in Northwestern Ecuador highlights the importance of these everyday encounters and how they can reveal larger themes about the community at large. This study focuses on Junin, a community impacted by the mining industry in northwestern Ecuador. Kneas focuses on daily interactions to draw conclusions about how the community has been impacted by mining companies. This paper and research follows the movement of the company out of the area, thus much of the discussion surrounds improved relationships between mineros, those for mining, and ecologistas, those against mining. Examining the everyday helps illuminate these subtle, but significant differences.

One of the first examples of the importance of the everyday in Kneas’s study involves the importance of word choice. Kneas makes note of one of his key informant’s, Gloria’s, use of the word “joder” to describe how the mineros treat the ecologistas. As Kneas notes, joder ranges in meaning from a playful “to mess with” to a more violent “to fuck with” depending on the context and tone used. Kneas states, “Throughout my time in Junín, I noted the ways ecologistas often depicted minero exploits as joder: actions that were decidedly antagonistic but had limited consequence. This use of joder exemplifies the types of communication that typify social play—the ways that oppositional actions simultaneously contained embedded stipulations of moderation” (Kneas 2018:756). Thus, Kneas demonstrates how something as seemingly simple as a word choice can reveal crucial, complex relationship information. The use of “joder”
showed that there is still some lingering animosity between the mineros and ecologistas but that their relationship is friendlier and less strained than it was in the past. Valuable information was gained by studying the everyday, micro interactions; it was only by focusing on individuals and details as subtle as word choice that he was able to understand this complex relationship.

Similarly to the word choice, Kneas is able to draw conclusions from other everyday acts. For example, he notes the way a young person was told to stand up to make way for an elder, despite that elder being from the “opposing side.” He observes the lack of direct conversation about the mining industry, which in and of itself is indicative of an effort to move past this conflict. The importance of these small, everyday acts is stated by Kneas directly in reference to the former example, “this and similar embodied forms of rapprochement resulted from the deliberate, everyday acts of human agency—the progressive transgression of boundaries that previously inhibited interactions between mineros and ecologistas” (Kneas 2018:759). As he expresses, everyday acts are important because they result in the larger, macro themes. It is through these daily actions that attitudes change and relationships are formed or broken. Thus, studying the everyday helps us to better understand how and why things are as they are.

Moreover, in simply studying larger themes, the intricacies of individual’s attitudes can be forgotten. Stories are often told as individuals firmly taking one side and violently protecting these beliefs. Yet, as Kneas notes, this tends to paint a somewhat false narrative. He writes, “Ethnographies of resistance are often drawn to moments similar to those that have punctuated the story in Intag—the burning of mining camps, the erection of roadblocks, and the demarcation of local boundaries. These exemplars of opposition do not, on the surface, align with the processes of equivocation that I have outlined in relation to play”. He continues with, “both mineros and ecologistas, in their measured positioning in relation to one another, refrained from fully occupying or committing to these subject positions” (Kneas 2018:757). Thus, the common narrative that mineros and ecologistas are constantly at war with one another creates misunderstanding. In truth, there is and was a high degree of interconnectedness between mineros and ecologistas, and even at their peak conflict, there was still some level of connection. Writing about the everyday allows a full understanding of these conflicts from a community and individual standpoint. The article shows that people did not want to be defined by identities of support or opposition to mining. They wanted to be seen as farmers, neighbors, and elders. It was exhausting to identify themselves in terms of mining, and they resisted against this classification.
Studying the everyday allowed their identities to expand and for focus to be placed on how they saw themselves and their interactions. This research expands beyond just this mining community, and it can be applied to indigenous people’s relationship with oil companies. They, too, resist being classified based on support or opposition to the industry, and they desire new ways to be seen. Writing about the everyday allows new representation and identities to be shared, and it allows the complexity and richness of their lives to be better recognized.

Michael Cepek researches the impacts of the petroleum industry on the Cofán people, who live in the Upper Ecuadorian Amazon. He approaches this research by acknowledging its complexity and the often conflicting perspectives Cofán people have regarding oil. He notes the value of this method, stating, “Oil is often an implicit, uncertain, and ambivalent phenomenon for the Cofán,” and later continues, “I argue that narratives of cultural devastation hinder attempts to understand how people both deny their destruction and actively prevent it” (Cepek 2012:395). These statements speak to documentaries such as *Crude*, which portray the Cofán as devastated victims of the petroleum industry who are always absorbed in their conflict with oil companies. It implies strong, unwavering opposition to oil companies on the part of indigenous people, thereby ignoring the complexity of the relationship between indigenous people and the petroleum industry. These traditional narratives mislead the public who, if they were to spend time with indigenous people in this region, would be shocked by the lack of oil’s presence. Moreover, the typical narrative ignores the complexity of the Cofanes encounter with petroleum. It also implies a loss of Cofán culture and a weakness of the Cofán, which is not a fair portrayal of the Cofán. This is not to say that the Cofán have not suffered grave consequences from the petroleum industry, but rather that a more intimate approach can help supplement these accounts and provide the most accurate depiction of the Cofán.

Cepek cites an everyday encounter to highlight the complexity of the Cofán’s relationship with oil companies. He writes, “One Dureno resident related a strange story in which he encountered a seismic crew in the forest. They spoke for hours. The workers gave him large sacks of tuna, lentils, noodles, oatmeal, rice, and sugar. In return, he gave them fresh paca meat” (Cepek 2012:407). This experience represents a positive, friendly exchange between indigenous people and petroleum company workers. Not only did they spend a long time talking, they exchanged goods with each other, demonstrating a willingness to help each other. The majority of Cofán do not think poorly of oil workers, and they would usually even work for the company
if given the opportunity. As Cepek states, “The image of oil as an instantly apparent and overwhelming power does not correspond to Cofán experiences” (Cepek 2012:407). Over time, they have seen the contamination and dangers of the petroleum industry and have now come to oppose the companies, but their daily lives are not consumed by constant negative encounters with petroleum companies. They have pleasant experiences with workers, such as the one described above, and many see the industry as a possible economic opportunity with regards to employment. The Cofán have suffered many losses, which are well described in works such as *Crude*, but in order to truly understand the Cofán and their relationship with the petroleum industry, it is important to also examine everyday encounters, such as the one Cepek describes between a Cofán and oil company workers.

In concluding his article, Cepek directly states the importance of this type of research for the Cofán. They spent decades coexisting with the oil companies before taking action against the industry. This demonstrates the complexity of the industry and its relationship with indigenous people. This complexity is often lost from narratives about the Cofán and along with it their ability to be truthful and accurately express their perspective and culture. Cepek depicts this point, stating, “Cofán people must walk a fine line. If they and their lands look as if they are “too devastated,” they will no longer appear as a distinct people with a perduring culture and a chance at resurgence. If they do not adequately express their loss, however, they will have a hard time eliciting essential forms of external support, including financial compensation” (Cepek 2012:410). In order to be good allies to indigenous people, such as the Cofán, we must acknowledge the contradictions in their relationship with the oil industry and accept that their stance is not truthfully in full opposition. For them, the topic is complicated and traditional narratives deprive them of their voice and authority over their own story. It is, therefore, imperative that we understand the Cofán, and indigenous people in general, as humans and accept and attempt to understand their lives outside of the traditional narratives we have assigned them. Studying the everyday gives voice to the complexity of Cofán peoples’ lives and interactions with oil companies, thereby allowing for the authentic deviation from stringent oppositional stances to the petroleum industry and a better understanding of Cofán identities and perspectives.

**My Research:**
During the spring of 2018, I was on a study abroad program in Ecuador. The program’s theme was “ecology and conservation,” and it was based in Ecuador’s capital, Quito. We were tasked with a research project for the last month we were there, which could be conducted in any part of the country. I chose to do mine on the environmental impacts of the petroleum industry in the Amazon. I was sent to live with a host family in a small, Kichwa community, Tamanco. The community was part of a rural parish outside of a slightly larger city, Sacha. Sacha was about an hour from Coca, which is one of the major cities in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Quito is to the west, and the Colombian border is about fifty miles north.

During this month-long research project, I conducted a few interviews with people from the town, trying to show some of the human impacts of the industry. In these interviews, I directly asked, “Do you think the presence of the petroleum industry has been a good thing or a bad thing?” I was expecting a resounding “bad thing” from everyone, yet nobody gave me that answer. Instead, everyone I talked to noted the good and bad aspects of the industry. They cited the town’s information center as one of the benefits. The oil companies paid, in part, to develop this building in the middle of town, which housed a few computers and internet access. It is the only place in town where people can access computers and internet; nobody individually owns a computer or has internet access in their homes. Thus, this addition to the town has been significant to people living there. While a lot of the imagery surrounding oil companies is of waste pits and dead or injured animals, people living in this community see computers as petroleum imagery. Their ability to access computers and internet is tied to the oil company’s presence, and the building serves as a constant, positive reminder of the industry’s existence. It represents a complicated relationship between this indigenous community living less than a kilometer from a petroleum platform and the oil companies that have invaded the area. While community members are aware of the negative effects to their health and environment, they do not see the situation as entirely bad, as I had expected. My host dad even mentioned the differences between oil company nationalities, thereby further complicating these relationships. According to him, those from the United States were a lot more friendly and gave more to them than those from China, who now operate in the area. It, therefore, became clear to me that indigenous relationships with oil companies are not as simple and contentious as they are often presented and thought of as.
Initially, I thought that indigenous relationships with oil companies could be easily classified. I had subscribed to the traditional rhetoric which pinned indigenous people fully against petroleum companies. I had assumed their interactions could be described as positive or negative, and I was surprised when people in the community resisted against classifying the company in this manner. My research question had wanted to categorize petroleum as either good or bad, but through my conversations with people living in this area, I realized the topic was too complex to be assessed in these terms. Thus, I decided to return to the same community again in May of 2019 in an attempt to better understand and describe this complexity.

During my time in the community in May 2019, I studied the everyday aspects of my host family in an attempt to better understand how, if at all, they interacted with oil companies on a regular basis. I also wanted to recognize their identities outside of the context of petroleum and highlight other aspects of their lives. In this way, I hoped to supplement the current literature, which tends to focus on the large, contentious interactions between indigenous people and the petroleum industry. In no way do I intend to negate the disastrous impacts of the petroleum industry on the area and its negative effects on indigenous people’s health and way of life. Rather, it was my hope to expand the understanding of their identities both within and outside the context of oil. My research focuses primarily on one household and explores their identities and understanding of the world. This is in contrast to research which focuses on indigenous groups as a whole, such as “the Kichwa” or the “the Cofán.” Starting at the smaller level of just the household allows greater individuality and diversity among members of these nations. Thus, by describing aspects of their everyday life, I hope to both show the complexity of their relationship with oil and give space to recognize other important aspects of this indigenous family’s life and identities.

In order to help organize the descriptions, I have subdivided them into two categories—“Household and Work” and “Community and Leisure.” While there is interconnectedness between these two larger categories, this provides a way to think about the distinct spheres of their lives. Within each section, I have individually titled descriptions, which together speak to the larger themes.

**Household and Work:**
**My Host Family:**

My host family lives in a small Kichwa Community in the upper Ecuadorian Amazon, divided into four distinct families lineages. Each family has one-fourth of the town’s territory and lives in their third of the community. With each passing generation, the land gets split between the children. Most people earn their living through farming their land. The primary crops sold are cacao and coffee beans, but many people grow other crops for their own consumption, too.

My host parents, Mariana and Alvaro, have two children, Sofía and Manuel.1 When I stayed with them in May 2019, Mariana was in her early thirties, Alvaro in his late thirties, Sofía was four, and Manuel was three. Alvaro and Mariana had more money than nearly anyone else in town. They both had jobs in addition to work on their farm. Alvaro worked for the government and received a monthly salary from them for that work. Mariana worked with Alvaro’s mom and one of his sisters to clean chickens at night. The three of them walk to a spot along the road where their boss brings a truck full of chickens. Once they finish preparing the chickens for consumption, they walk home and the chickens are delivered to stores in Sacha to be sold. Although neither she nor Alvaro like that she has to leave in the middle of the night to do this work, it pays well and helps them provide for their children. They also earn some money from their farm, but this is a much harder and less dependable source of income, so it is not their primary source. Both Alvaro and Mariana’s jobs are possible because of the history of migration into the area. Colonization lead to the creation of new parishes and therefore governmental positions, such as the one Alvaro occupies. Mariana helps clean chickens to be sold in Sacha, which is a city that grew because of oil and colonist populations. Prior to their settlement into the area, there would not have been a market to sell them to. Thus, the majority of their household income is a result of petroleum and colonist growth in the region.

Mariana’s family is from Tena, which is a city about two to three away by bus. One of her sisters and one of her brothers live in this community, too. Her brother came to teach at the Tamanco’s school, and her sister met her husband by visiting her brother. Mariana met Alvaro visiting her sister, and she has now lived with him in this community since 2013. Most of Mariana’s family, however, still lives in Tena. Mariana was born to two Kichwa parents, and her first language is Kichwa. Alvaro is from the community, and his family, therefore, lives here. His mom is fully Kichwa, but his father was mestizo. While he can understand Kichwa and
somewhat speak it, he is more comfortable with Spanish. He participates in conversations that are being had in Kichwa, but he generally spoke Spanish, and that was almost always the language spoken between him, Mariana, Sofia, and Manuel. I will expand upon this topic of language and cultural differences between Mariana and Alvaro and the different generations later in my thesis.

The community, Tamanco, was founded in 1970 by four main families who came together from another Kichwa community near Sacha. Though the story of Tamanco’s founding varied some between each person who told it, the general consensus is that they settled in the town around the same time that oil companies and colonists entered the area. They helped extend the road to Tamanco and settled there when it was more of a jungle. There are stories of tigers once roaming the area, and while tigers are not an Amazonian species, this fable still suggests how much less developed this region was when the town’s founders settled here. Though they created a new community, they were from the region, so the territory was not a new frontier like it was for colonists.

**Their house:**

My host family’s house was built in late 2017 and early 2018. Alvaro and Mariana took out a loan from the bank to buy the materials, and they then built the house themselves. It is made out of concrete, and the roof is tin. It has five rooms—four equal size rooms centered around a common living area. Each room has a window, and both the common room and kitchen have doorways that lead outside. The doorways and windows are cut-out holes—there is no glass or door covering them. There are, however, short wooden boards that cover each of the doorways into the house. This was new since I was there in April 2018. They were put up to keep the chickens out of the house. The doorway is also home to several pairs of shoes. We always took our shoes off before entering the house, so many of the shoes lay outside on the porch.

My host family had six chickens when I was there, which let roam around freely outside. They feed them food scraps and sometimes corn they buy from the store. They had about twenty-five in 2018, but according to Mariana most of them died from some disease. They would like to buy more, but they are expensive to buy. The chickens are used for both eggs and meat. Mariana told me that when she was younger, she saw chickens as her pets. One day, her family had no food, so her mom had to kill her chicken. Mariana went to another room and waited there until it
was killed. Even now, she does not like killing chickens, even though she does not mind cleaning them. This detail shows how economically important her night job is. She has to kill and clean chickens every night despite it upsetting her. With few economic opportunities, however, she does not have much of an option. The use of chickens is part of the transition to an oil community. They are not traditionally used by Kichwa people, and show a foreign influence. Now, she cleans chickens every night as her job and raises them for personal use. While the connection to oil is not immediately obvious, it is present, and has had a profound impact on her everyday life.

Looking into the house, my room was on the left and closest to the doorway to the house. My room had the only door in the house; they put it up while I was there the first time to give me and the other person I was there with more privacy from the kids as well as to seem more secure from others coming into our room, such as people from neighboring towns. Whenever we all left the house, they tied a rope through the sliding lock as a way of “locking” the door. My window was also the only one in the house to have something covering the hole. They put a wooden frame around the inside of it, and then put wooden, vertical bars along this frame. They also hung up curtains on the inside of my room that I could put down.

All four of them shared a bedroom. Their room was on the left side further from the doorway to the house. They have one larger bed and one smaller, twin bed in the room. Before I came in 2018, they just had the larger bed. My program required them to buy a bed for both me and my roommate, so the new bed in their room was a change. They also have a chest of drawers where they all stored their clothes. They also have a curtain that covers their window and another that drapes over their doorway. They tie up the curtains during the day.

The middle of the house connects the other four room and serves as the living room. It has the fridge and a table where all the meals are eaten at. The table is a red plastic one, which is covered by a table cloth and a plastic sheet over that as a way to protect the table cloth. Red, plastic chairs surround the table and are also stacked in the corner, which were moved around the table whenever we all ate together (Figure 2).
Figure 2: The main room in my host family's house.

The room on the right closer to the doorway is a spare room that has the laundry lines that can be used when it’s raining outside. There are a couple of chairs that usually have heaps of laundry needing to be hung; the lines are much shorter than the ones outside, so there is not room for all of the clothes inside. The room also serves as storage for the equipment they bring to their field and other, miscellaneous things.

The kitchen is the room on the right further from the doorway. It has a fragile wooden table pushed against one of the walls where they sometimes will eat, especially if someone’s food is ready before others’. For example, when cooking fried plantains or empanadas, Mariana is not able to cook enough for everyone at once. There is a stove top over an oven, which is how Mariana prepares all of the meals. The sink is part of a larger counter space. A hose comes from outside and serves as the faucet for the sink. They also have a large bucket with a twist-on lid beneath the counter that they use to store dry food (Figure 3).
Outside the house, just beside the kitchen, is where they wash clothes and take showers. There is a small wooden platform that you step on. There is a large, blue bucket on the platform that has a spicket connecting to their well. A down-sloping table comes to about waist-level on the platform, and it is covered in a blue tarp. A tin roof covers the platform and part of the table. The table is where the laundry is done. A bowl sits on the table that can be used to get water from the bucket to wash the clothes with. Moreover, the bowl is used to gather the water to take a shower. A small stream of murky water is ever-present beneath and extending from this table. A path went through the bushes to the side of this area to the neighbor’s yard. Since my host family did not have an outhouse of their own, they used this path to access the neighbor’s (Figure 4).
The wells were installed about ten years ago by the petroleum company. This was the first project the community wanted done with the arrival of the company. Before the wells, they got water from rivers, but the wells are much more convenient and theoretically less contaminated. Every house has their own well, so they are able to have running water, which is a change from when they got water from rivers. This, therefore, represents a subtle but important impact of oil companies on the community. Every time they use water they are interacting with oil. They may not consciously recognize this interaction every time, but petroleum’s presence is impossible for them to forget. Oil is an intrinsic part of their life and has created much of the infrastructure they use. This infrastructure extends beyond just the roads which are commonly discussed to something as basic and important as water availability. Thus, petroleum’s impact has been large and dramatically shaped the town’s infrastructure so that those living in Tamanco are constantly interacting with oil to some degree.

The house’s relationship to the rest of the town can be seen in figure six. The colored dotted lines represent the separation of land between the four families. Though the map is not drawn to scale and does not include every house and landmark, it provides a basic understanding of how the my host family’s house was situated in relation to the rest of town (Figure 5).
Figure 5: A map depicting the basic relation of my host family's house in relation to the rest of Tamanco.

**Typical Weekday:**

Nearly every morning, I woke up to either Sofía or Manuel, my five and four year old host siblings, watching videos on Alvaro and Mariana’s phone just before six. The rest of the family woke up earlier, but having had my own room I was able to sleep in a little later. Typically, Mariana was just then getting home, too. Depending on the night, she might already be home helping get the kids ready for school or she may get home closer to seven after they are already on their way to school, leaving Alvaro to get them dressed, fed, and on the bus. Alvaro and Mariana walk the kids to the bus stop a little after six and wait with them until the bus comes at about 6:30. In the morning, older kids accompany Sofía and Manuel to school so that Alvaro and Mariana are able to stay home. Alvaro usually comes home a few minutes before Mariana from the bus stop, as Mariana is busy talking to some other women who see their kids off here in the morning. Alvaro begins getting ready for work by taking a shower and getting dressed, while Mariana comes back and prepares breakfast for us three.

Breakfasts varied greatly depending on the day. Sometimes we ate fried plantains with cheese, other times potato cakes with a salad and fried egg, and occasionally we had something
as simple as white bread covered with butter and toasted using a mini George Foreman type grill. Cheese was a typical protein, which they bought from a neighbor who made the cheese herself. Tea and coffee were offered as choices for a drink and could be made with heated water or milk. As we ate breakfast, we watched the news. Their tv is typically in their bedroom, but they had moved it into the main room for the month I was there so that we could all watch it together. After breakfast, Alvaro finishes putting his stuff together and gelling his hair before heading to work. Depending on the day, he either heads to Loreto, the capital of the parish, Sacha, the capital of the canton, or Coca, capital of the province. Rarely, he might need to go to Quito for a night or two, but he only did this once between the two months I stayed there. About once a week, he does not have to work for the government and will instead go work in the field.

In order to get to work, Alvaro might get a ride on a motorcycle or in a truck from another government member. He also sometimes took the “ranchero,” which is the bus that runs between the rural towns in the parish and nearby city. Once he leaves, Mariana typically slept for at least an hour. Depending on the day, she may sleep two or three hours, sleeping until it was time to go pick the kids up from school, or not sleep at all and do housework. Usually, however, she would sleep for part of the time and do chores part of the time. The housework consisted of sweeping, washing clothes, and beginning to prepare lunch. Washing clothes was by far the most time-consuming chore. Occasionally Alvaro would help her with it in the afternoon, but she generally did it for everyone in the family by herself. Having no washing machine, everything was washed by hand. Alvaro’s mom did have a washing machine, so Mariana would usually wash bedding there, but almost always washed clothes by hand. She said that the clothes did not come nearly as clean in the washing machine as they did by hand, which is why she continued to wash them by hand. She probably averaged spending an hour or two each day washing clothes. Manuel and Sofía change clothes often, so they may have multiple outfits that need to be washed each day. This work is also not easy; it is physically demanding to get the clothes actually clean. After washing the clothes, they were hung on drying lines outside of the house. They also had drying lines in one of the rooms in the house, and they would move the clothes there when it rained and usually at night in case it rained. Whenever it started to rain during the day, everyone immediately dropped what they were doing and ran outside to grab the clothes to move them inside.
By about 10:30am, Mariana would take a shower and get dressed to go to Sacha to pick up the kids. Whenever anyone from the town went to Sacha, they dressed up in nicer clothes and shoes and often did their hair and make-up. After getting ready, we would go sit at the bus stop. The bus was supposed to pass at 11:30am, but sometimes it would come earlier, later, or not at all. Generally, we waited on the bus with several other people. Some were also wanting to go to Sacha and others were simply wanting to socialize. Usually, it was older women who would linger around the stop, but there was also a younger guy I was friends with who would often sit with us and talk to me while Mariana talked to the other women. Mariana would often speak Kichwa with people at the bus stop, especially those who were older. They would usually switch back and forth between languages, and sometimes one person would speak Kichwa and another would respond in Spanish. Kichwa is Mariana’s first language, and she said it’s easier for her to speak than Spanish, though both are easy for her. In town, it is generally women and older men who prefer to speak Kichwa. Manuel and Sofía do not speak Kichwa, which is in contrast to their Mariana who prefers this language. She rarely speaks it in the house, however, because Alvaro strongly prefers Spanish.

As we waited for the bus to come, we also tried to flag down any car or truck that passed. They did not usually stop, but occasionally an empty taxi or petroleum truck would stop and give us a ride either into Sacha or at least closer to the city where more buses would run. We did not have to pay the trucks when they picked us up, and we got a discounted price on the taxis. Once we made it to Sacha, we had a ten to fifteen minute walk to get to the school. Mariana would keep asking me for the time, and then say how late we were going to be. The fear of being late to pick up the kids was a constant anxiety and a departure from the general laid-back attitude towards time. Under different contexts, people in town, including Mariana, would be up to a couple hours late from a scheduled meeting time without thinking too much of it.

Sofía and Manuel attended a private school, and they were some of the only people from the community to go to this school. Most people could not afford to send their kids to school here. There was a cost of attendance, required meal plan, and transportation costs of getting to and from the school every day. This difference reveals differing identities and class within the Tamanco as well. Even within the community, class and wealth are at play. Mariana and Alvaro both have jobs which allow them to earn far more money than if they only cultivated their farm. This differentiated them from most others in the community. It allows them to do more, such as
send their kids to private school in an attempt to provide them a better education than most other kids in the community will receive. This difference is important, and can be seen only outside of the traditional narratives of indigenous communities. Looking at the everyday, there is space to recognize intracommunity differences and positioning, which is an important element of their lives.

Mariana’s interactions with the school were underscored underlying elements of class and race. Every day before we left to pick the kids up from school, Mariana woke up from her short time asleep to take a shower, but on nice clothes and shoes, carefully brush her hair, and often put on makeup. She dressed up in a way she would not if we were walking around Tamanco. Around Tamanco, people rarely bothered to do their hair or make-up and tended to wear shorts and tank tops or t-shirts. There was more care for her appearance when we went to Sacha and to the school. We would then wait at the bus stop for an hour or more many days trying to make sure we got to town on time. The buses, however, were unreliable and would sometimes come early, late, or not at all. This made getting to school by noon incredibly difficult, despite immense efforts taken by Mariana. This was not taken into account by the kids’ teachers, and we were scolded if we came more than a few minutes late. While many of the other parents came from the city and could take the much more frequent and reliable transportation to the school and Mariana could not, little understanding was given to Mariana for these extenuating circumstances.

Moreover, the way Mariana interacted with the other parents and teachers from Sofía and Manuel’s school was subtly different than the way she spoke and carried herself around people from town. She seemed more submissive when interacting with the teachers, even frequently offering to help them clean their classrooms. While she was loudly opinionated when talking to people from the community, she quietly took criticism and reprimands from Sofía and Manuel’s teachers about being late to pick them up or their performance and behavior in class. She accepted whatever they said and seemed hyper-aware of her kids’ behavior when we were in their teachers’ presence, making sure to harshly scold them when they started acting silly or running around. Moreover, she seemed deeply distressed by the criticism she received from the teachers in a way she did not seem upset by the words of other people in town. For example, after Manuel’s teacher told her she was not giving as much attention to Manuel as she did to Sofía and that his work was therefore falling behind, she spent hours sitting down at the table
with Manuel making sure he did his homework. Mariana had gotten her night job cleaning chickens since Sofia had been in this teacher’s class. This job makes it harder for Mariana to do chores around the house and help Sofia and Manuel with their homework, as she is sleeping for part of the day. This fact was neglected by the teacher, and not brought up by Mariana. Later that night when Alvaro got home, Mariana emotionally told him what had been said at school. Moreover, she grew as angry as I have ever seen her when Manuel refused to do any more of his work. Mariana seemed to feel the need to prove herself to Brianna and Manuel’s teachers, even though this often meant overcoming many socioeconomic barriers. Her anger at home towards Manuel was in stark contrast to how subdued she was interacting with his teachers at school. Class was functioning as a stressor for her, which lead to her anger later at home.

It is also interesting to note that Mariana and Alvaro shared a phone. During the day, he would take the cell phone with him to work, so Mariana has no real way of knowing what time it is. Asking her about this, she said she has figured out which shows are on the television at any given time, which gives her some concept of time. She also said that as people walk by the house she’ll call out to ask for the time. Yet this again represents an obstacle Mariana has to overcome in making sure she gets to school on time to pick up her kids.

Once at the kids’ school, we go first to Manuel’s classroom to pick him up and then to Sofia’s room. The teachers gave a report of how the kids had done in school that day. Generally, Sofia had done well while Manuel had acted out and struggled with the material. We would then take the kids and walk to the bus stop in Sacha. The bus left at 1pm, although it tended to leave late. It was always overcrowded, but we usually got to the bus early enough to find seats. By the end of my time there, Mariana started buying our bus tickets from the bus company’s office, which gave us guaranteed seats, so we were able to wait outside the bus until closer to the time it left. Usually, the seats were taken on a first come first served basis, and people would pay their fare when one of the employees walked around during the ride. The tickets, however, were prepaid and gave specific seat numbers. Mariana could ask people sitting in those seats to move by showing them the ticket. The tickets were not used by many people, but I saw them used more and more throughout the time I was there. Mariana and the kids would fall asleep within a few minutes of leaving the city, and I would wake them up just before our bus stop. Other people from the community always rode the bus, too, so they would also help wake up Mariana if I
ended up separated from her on the bus. Manuel cried when he was woken up to be carried off, and Sofía continued to sleep as we carried her home.

Once back home, the kids would sometimes continue napping or sometimes run off to play at a neighbor’s house while Mariana worked to prepare lunch. A couple times a week, however, we would run late in Sacha and end up skipping lunch. On the 1pm bus, we would not get home until 1:30 or 1:45pm, so lunch would not be ready until 2:30 or 3pm. Thus, if we ended up taking longer at the kids’ school or shopping for groceries in Sacha and leaving on the 1:30pm bus, Mariana would suggest skipping lunch and opting for an earlier dinner instead. I think part of this was due to her schedule as well. She always slept in the afternoons, so a later lunch would have cut into the time she had to sleep. The kids receive lunch at school, so it was just mine and her lunch that was skipped. Thus, when I am not there, I would guess she skips lunch more often. She seemed relieved whenever I offered to skip lunch on days we got home later and she seemed particularly exhausted. Her night job means she rarely sleeps, and her sleep is broken up into a few one or two hour shifts throughout the day. She admitted to being tired all the time due to this job, but she values the money she makes and the ability it gives her to afford more things for her kids, like their notebooks for school.

After lunch, Mariana would sleep for a few hours. The kids would sometimes play with other kids and sometimes they would play games or watch the tv with me. They had one puzzle in particular that Manuel and I would take turns putting together almost every day. We could put it together fifty times in a day, and he would still want to continue racing against me. The tv only had one station, and during the day it had a lot of shows from the US dubbed in Spanish, such as Spongebob and the Simpsons. The Simpsons was the kids’ favorite.

Depending on the day, Alvaro could be home as early as 3pm or as late as 7pm. If he was home early, he would generally go work in the field for a few hours. If the kids were around, they begged to go with him, but they were only able to go if Mariana went, too, as she watched after them as he worked. If it was raining, everyone stayed home and napped during the afternoon.

There were soccer games in the late afternoon a few times a week. Each of the rural towns had a women and men’s soccer team that would meet at different towns to play each other. Alvaro did not play on the team, but Mariana sometimes did. When I was there in 2018, she usually played in the games, but when I was there this time, she rarely played. She said that they
did not do well enough for her to enjoy playing on that team—she enjoyed playing for the school team more, which had games every Saturday morning. Nevertheless, the soccer games were popular social events. We usually rode on motorcycles to get to them; typically, one of Alvaro’s brothers or uncles would take us on their motorcycle. The women would play first and then the men.

Motorcycles were the most common means of transportation between the rural towns. Few people rode them into the city because there were stricter laws for riding on those roads, such as mandating the use of helmets, which few people had. Instead, the buses were typically used to go further than a neighboring town. Nobody in the community owned a car, as they were too expensive. The majority of people did not own motorcycles either, including my host family, due to its cost. Thus, motorcycles were often borrowed and used communally within a family.

If there was not a soccer game, household chores were usually done in the late afternoon, such as cleaning the dishes or sweeping the house. Then, Mariana would sit down with Sofía and Manuel to make sure they did their homework. Sofía generally did a good job on her work, but Manuel consistently pitched fits and refused to do his homework. Mariana threatened him with a plant that grew in their neighbor’s yard, “ortiga.” It has sharp thorns, and leaves red welts on the skin. Though I rarely saw Mariana or Alvaro actually hit the kids with the plant, they both responded to its threat, sometimes crying at its mere mention. Alvaro was proud of the plant, calling it very “oriente,” and noted its long history and ability to treat various problems, such as cramps, bad mood, and lack of motivation.

By about 7pm, Mariana and Alvaro would start cooking dinner. While Mariana tended to lead the preparations, Alvaro usually helped and sometimes would take the lead. During this time, the kids and I watched the Simpsons and Ugly Betty while the kids played games on Mariana and Alvaro’s phone. The news came on at 8pm, just after we began eating. The news was on until 8:30pm, but we almost always turned it off and went to bed by 8:15pm. Alvaro took a strong interest in the news, and would often stay out and watch it until 8:30pm even though everyone else went to bed. The electricity we used at night was another, subtle interaction with oil. The petroleum industry gives money to the government, which helps them subsidize products, such as electricity. This makes electricity affordable to people like my host family who would otherwise struggle to afford its use. This enables them to have light at night after the sun
sets and watch television. Electricity is used daily, and is another important aspect of the petroleum industry’s infrastructure which has impacted the community.

Lunch and dinner were typically about fifty percent carbs, twenty-five percent vegetables, and twenty-five percent protein. The carbohydrate was usually either plantains or rice, although we occasionally ate yuca, noodles, or potatoes. They grew plantains in their field, so we usually ate them with at least one meal a day. Rice was less than $0.50 a pound, so we also tended to eat it with one meal a day. The government subsidized the rice, which has made its use grow tremendously. Again, subsidization is possible largely due to oil companies. Thus, petroleum companies have impacted something as basic as the food people in this region eat. Rice is now a fundamental part of the diet, which is a result of the petroleum industry’s wealth. The protein varied, but was often chicken, fish, eggs, or cheese. Alvaro caught fish when he could from various ponds in their fields. Occasionally, we had lentils, but this was rare. For vegetables, we typically either had carrots and broccoli cooked together, or a salad with lettuce, tomato, and lime juice and salt. We also had some juice. Two of the most common were orange juice and lemon juice, as they grow both oranges and limes.

Alvaro said that growing up, they ate a lot more yuca, which is one of the most traditional Kichwa foods. It can be grown in the region, and Alvaro’s mom has a small plot of land where she grows them. He said that ever since the petroleum plant’s establishment five years ago, yuca has been difficult to grow. Now, there are a lot of diseases and fungi that infect the plant. He said that it had grown well ever since he was a child until the oil company came, and he blames the company for this change. Moreover, he claims that it has affected a lot of other crops, too. This, therefore, represents an important economic and cultural impact the petroleum industry has had on their lives. Yuca is traditionally a staple food in the Kichwa diet. My host family knows several ways to prepare it, and it is also traditionally used to make an alcoholic drink, which is drunk during cultural celebrations. Now, however, plantains have largely overtaken the use of yuca in their diet. Thus, the potential loss of yuca signifies a loss in culture. It also signifies an economic impact and threat to their survival. Much of the economic revenue earned and food eaten by people in the town come from their farms. Contamination of their land, therefore, has led to increased difficulty in growing food for themselves and in earning the money to buy food.
Everyday Encounters with Oil:

The bus stop was just updated earlier this year with money from the parish. It now has a nice covering that offers protection in the rain, and a large, stone bench to sit on. People tend to congregate here, even if they have no interest in going into town. Whenever we waited on the bus, we also attempted to hitch hike. The buses were unreliable, so any chance to get closer to town and to better transportation was taken. There is only one road that passes through all of the rural communities, so all of the trucks, taxis, and buses have to pass by this bus stop. We were rarely successful with cars, but were successful with petroleum trucks a few times. I do think it’s important to note that my presence may have had some influence in how frequently we were picked up. My host mom laughed that every car that passed the bus stop would honk because I was there, and other people also said that they had a much easier time flagging down a ride sitting next to me. Even without me there, however, it they must still be successful enough for it to be something that they try to do.

The petroleum trucks are recognizable by the petroleum labels on the side of the trucks. Several of their vehicles would pass on the road every hour. Sometimes they were big eighteen wheelers with open backs carrying pipes or supplies and sometimes they were small pickup trucks the workers road in. The large trucks are disliked for their noise by the people in the community. Some people I talked to complained of waking up at night to their noise and having the doors of their house shake as the trucks passed by. Yet, they were who most often gave us rides into town. On one of these rides in particular, I was with Mariana, Sofia, and Manuel when one of the trucks stopped and let us climb in. Mariana, Sofia, and Manuel sat on the bed, which was just behind the driver and passenger seats. I sat in the passenger seat. In the truck, he and Mariana conversed in a friendly manner. He said what he was doing and talked about his harsh schedule; he had to start driving at 4am and would be driving most of the day. Mariana showed sympathy for his schedule and asked him questions about his job, making small talk like you would expect in any other situation.

As we neared the end of this road which connected all of the rural towns, we encountered several heavily armed military members with dogs. As we came upon them, the driver told me to take Manuel, since he was technically too young to ride in the back. We quickly complied, and Mariana ordered Manuel to sit with me with a sense of urgency in her voice; she wanted to help
make sure the driver did not get into any trouble. When we got to the military stop, they ordered
us to stop and get out of the truck. They and their dogs investigated the truck for any drugs,
while we all stood to the side. I asked Mariana if this was normal, and she said it was a fairly
common occurrence. I saw them again another time while I was there, though that time I was in
the ranchero, so we were not stopped. Mariana explained that we were close to the border with
Colombia, which is why they were so vigilant about drugs.

In traditional narratives, such as in the documentary *Crude*, the story given is indigenous
people versus petroleum companies. Yet, in this context, Mariana worked with the petroleum
company worker to help make sure he did not get in trouble with the police. The “us” became the
petroleum company worker and an indigenous woman against the “them” of the military. This is
a sharp contrast from what is told in *Crude*, for example, and reveals complexity and contrasts to
the traditional story of indigenous people versus oil companies.

After they finished searching the truck, we were allowed to continue on our journey.
Reaching the road where our directions differed, we thanked the driver and parted with well
wishes. Despite the driver being an employee for the oil company, there was no noticeable
animosity between him and Mariana. He did not have to stop for us, but he did because he
wanted to help us get to the city and probably because he wanted the company for the few
minutes we would be in the car with him. Mariana was extremely appreciative of the ride, and
she also seemed to take a genuine interest in what he had to say and feel bad for him and his
schedule. They did not talk about any problems the oil companies had caused for indigenous
people or any trouble indigenous people had given the petroleum industry. They talked as two
strangers would in any other situation. The larger-level conflicts between the companies and
indigenous people did not seem to register with either of them during this interaction, and they
instead engaged as two people trying to help each other and show compassion and interest in
each other.

**Family trip to farm:**

One day after school when Alvaro also got home early from work, the family decided to
go to the farm together. The kids love going, as they get to eat lots of freshly picked fruit.
Manuel likes going more than Sofia, as Sofia realizes there are lots of bugs, many of which bite
or sting. Alvaro and Mariana tried to convince the kids to stay with Alvaro’s mom since neither
have boots and since they both are more work than help at their age. Yet, they both insisted on going until Mariana and Alvaro finally conceded to the idea.

Alvaro and Mariana both wear hats and each have a machete that they bring with them to the field. Mariana also brings a basket to gather the food. Their farm is about a fifteen minute walk from their house. We passed other people’s farms as we go as well as people working in those fields. We stopped for a minute or two to say hello to people as we passed them. Once in the farm, Alvaro is the primary worker. Mariana looks after the kids, though she does do some work, too. For example, as Alvaro went deep into a dense part of the field to look for various crops and a pond to fish in, Mariana used her machete to trim some of the trees and bushes along the periphery. As she was doing this, Sofía announced that she had to go to the bathroom, and thus Mariana’s attention was stolen away from the field work.

As we walked to their field, we first came across the orange trees. Alvaro shook them in an attempt to have the ripe oranges fall. With few having fell, he climbed up the trees, picking and dropping the ripe oranges. The kids gleefully ran to pick them up and put them in the basket Mariana brought. Meanwhile, Mariana sat on a log, watching Alvaro and the kids work. Once back on the ground, Alvaro used his machete to peel an orange for everyone. He also cut a slit at the top of the oranges so that it is easy to suck out their juice. Once they were done with the orange, they threw it to the side of the path wherever we were; the oranges were mostly consumed for their juice, so parts of its skin and flesh were left over and discarded. Alvaro then peeled a new orange in the same manner and gave it to that person so that everyone ate multiple oranges on the journey to the main part of the farm.

The cacao plants are the primary crop that is grown, and they are in the interior of the field. Both Alvaro and Mariana worked to cut off the rotting cacao beans with their machetes, and they both remark on how many rotten cacao beans there are, blaming a disease called “escoba de brujas (witch’s broom).” The kids hung from the trees’ branches and pluck ripe cacao beans, which resulted in one of the harshest scoldings I ever saw from their parents. The cacao fruit is delicious, which is why the kids pick it—they want their parents to cut one open for them. They are each given one, and they suck on them while we continue. Sugar cane is mixed in with the cacao, and Alvaro and Mariana cut each of us part of the sugar cane to eat.

Alvaro and Mariana use cacao clippers to cut the fruit from the trees. The clippers were given to them by the previous petroleum company that worked in the area. Alvaro noted this fact
as an example of why the United States based companies were better for them than the current Chinese ones. They had been able to negotiate with the previous company for these clippers, which is something they could not do with the current one. The clippers help them harvest more cacao more easily, and represent a subtle impact of the petroleum industry on everyday life.

While the clippers are something positive that people in Tamanco received, Alvaro is still aware of how his ability to use the land has been constrained due to the petroleum company. He is certainly happy to have these clippers, but while he uses them to cut cacao, he also notes how many trees have the disease “escoba de brujas.” He blames the frequency of the disease on oil companies. Thus, while the petroleum company gave him clippers to harvest his cacao, they also hampered his ability to grow this plant. Moreover, the company inhibited his ability to grow traditional foods for personal consumption, too. He cannot grow yuca like he could when he was young, for example. Thus, while he is grateful for the clippers, he is also very aware of how oil has constrained his ability to cultivate the land.

The edges of the farm are lined with plantain palms. Turning his attention to these palms, Alvaro looked for long, fallen branches. He sharpened both ends and stuck one end into the palm and the other into the ground. This was to help stabilize the tree. Since only one bunch of plantains grow on each palm, the palm becomes lopsided in weight. The uneven weight distribution makes them susceptible to winds and storms. We saw some trees that had fallen in a recent storm due to this weight. The plantains grown from these plants are an important part of my host family’s diet, so it is critical that the palms remain healthy. Alvaro told me that some people sold the plantains they grew, but he did not think they were worth selling. Instead, plantains are a staple in the family’s diet and help limit what they have to buy from the store. Alvaro cut down one bunch of plantains to bring back home with us.

Before returning home, Alvaro and Mariana both went to harvest “palmito,” or heart of palm. It had caught Alvaro’s eye as we were walking home. Alvaro asked me if I had ever had palmito before, and when I said no, he responded with pride and joy saying that we would eat that for dinner that night. He said it was very typical of the Amazon and delicious when prepared with a little bit of butter and cheese. He looked on with excitement as I ate it later that night, and smiled widely with pride as I told him how delicious I thought it was. His pride for the palmito was unsurprising, as he was also excited and proud to show me the plants of the Amazon. Whenever he made orange juice from the oranges in the field, he made sure I knew how fresh
and pure it was. When he and Mariana used the ortiga to threaten the kids, he told me all of its benefits and its long history in the region. When talking about the food in Quito, he described it as processed and not as hearty as the food in the oriente. He was proud of his town and region, and he drew a lot of that pride from the plants that are grown and their knowledge of how to cultivate and then prepare them.

During a separate conversation over lunch one day, Alvaro told me that when he was a kid, they did not buy any food from the market. They grew many more foods in their fields, including rice and corn. They also ate wild animals they hunted. Over time, there was a decline in animals and an increase in people. With more people, more land became cultivated and there was also less farm area for any individual person. The town’s land is subdivided among the kids of each passing generation, so whereas an older generation may have thirty hectares, newer generations have three. Surrounding towns are mostly comprised of mestizos, who colonized the area with the invasion of the petroleum industry in the late twentieth century. These towns limit the community’s ability to grow and meet land demands of current generations. Moreover, as mentioned in reference to yuca, Alvaro has noted a declining ability to grow crops since the petroleum platform was established in their town. He believes it has led to increased diseases and fungi, and plants that had always grown well suddenly became difficult to produce. Thus, oil companies have impacted, both directly and indirectly, the ability of current and future generations to cultivate the crops Alvaro finds so much pride and tradition in.

Alvaro emphasizes the land’s importance when thinking about his culture and history. He finds importance in what he can grow and in the landscapes that exist. This presents a contrast to Mariana who tends to value more strongly language. Their ideas of how to value and celebrate Kichwa culture was sometimes at odds, such as in whether to value land or language. Another example was during a competition to crown the “queen” of the parish. Teenage girls from different towns in the parish competed in this beauty contest, and one of the acts involved them each performing a traditional Kichwa dance. They danced with elements of traditional Kichwa clothing and to Kichwa music, despite only two of the six being Kichwa. Mariana took offense to this, and mentioned how people were dancing to music they did not even understand. She felt appropriation of her culture through this event. Alvaro, however, was proud of the contest, including this portion. He felt it was all in good spirits. He perhaps felt it was a way to share their culture and have it accepted by people throughout the parish and region. This contrast in
perspectives and beliefs between Mariana and Alvaro is representative of different values and beliefs among people in the community and Kichwa people as a whole. Traditional narratives do not allow space for these differences, but they are important to recognize. Indigenous groups are diverse in thoughts, place value on different aspects of their culture, and have different perspectives in how to interact with other groups of people. These differences are important to capture, which can only be done outside of the traditional stories told.

After a couple hours in the field, we all walked back home with all of the food that we had gathered from the farm. Once home, everyone showered and Mariana and Alvaro began preparing dinner.

**Community and Leisure:**

**Soccer Game:**

Mariana played soccer for both the town and for her kids’ school. Being extremely competitive, she preferred to play for the school than for Tamanco, who, according to her, tended to do better and take it more seriously. I attended a couple of the school matches and several of the town games, which were a popular event for everyone in the community. The school team was comprised of parents and teachers from Sofia’s grade. Mariana told me that she was required to be on the team, though when I pressed for an answer as to what would happen if she did not participate, she did not have an answer. They met for their games Saturday mornings at 11:30am. The kids would typically accompany her, though they stayed back to go with their grandma to the festivals in Loreto when those were occurring. Everyone on the team had the same green jersey and knee high socks. She also had special shoes she wore for soccer, which she would change into once we got to the soccer stadium.

One of the games in particular I went to was a bright, sunny day. Realizing it was already 9:45am, me, Mariana, and the kids scrambled to throw our shoes on and get out of the door to catch the bus to Sacha. The kids, being too young to quickly tie their shoes, lagged behind. As we walked the few hundred meters from the house to the bus stop, we saw the bus pull up to the stop. Mariana started running and yelling at her kids to catch it, but we were just a minute too late, and we ended up missing the bus. Since it was a Saturday, the next bus was not coming until 11:30am, which was the time the soccer game was starting. So, we all waited for a taxi to drive
by and also attempted to hitchhike with any cars or trucks that passed. Finally, a petroleum truck came by and let us jump in (note that this was the interaction written about in the narrative titled “Bus stop/ petroleum truck ride”). We made it to Sacha by 10:30am, which was an hour before the game, so we went to the park for half an hour. The park is small and located in the center of the city. It has a couple of swings, slides, and areas for kids to climb on. Outside of the play area, adults can sit on benches, many of which are under the shade of trees. Mariana and I sat on the benches looking at our phones. Since cell service is severely limited in town, we both took advantage of that opportunity to use our phones and access the internet.

At eleven, we started to walk to school, which was about a fifteen minute walk. A variety of treats are sold along the periphery of the park, which caught Manuel and Sofía’s attention on our way, so we stopped to buy them juice and snow cones. The snow cone juices had a swarm of wasps around them, and one wasp ended up on Manuel’s snow cone, which resulted in his tears and refusal to eat it. After trying to reason with him, Mariana ended up eating the snow cone herself and we continued our walk to the school.

Once at the school, we met up with the other players by the bleachers. The bleachers had a cover, which provided some shade. The field they played on was a large grass field. This is in contrast to the concrete or mud fields used in the rural towns, and it is an indication of greater wealth. The players decided who would start, put their shoes and socks on, braided their hair, and talked. Mariana passed her phone off to the kids to play with while she was playing. They both watched YouTube the whole game and had a few fights over whose turn it was to hold and control the phone. A woman sold small treats, such as frozen treats, empanadas, chips, and water in the bleachers. Sofía and Manuel kept asking for money to buy food from the woman until Mariana decided to buy them each a frozen treat after the game had ended.

Mariana began the game in leggings, but she ran to the bathroom during the halftime break to change out of them and into shorts due to the heat. The other women playing used the water bags they were given in this break to pour over their heads. They were still able to run around and play the game, but they were hot, too. Mariana scored a goal during the game, which she prided herself on for the rest of the day. She was frustrated that the kids were too busy watching videos on the phone to notice her make the goal.

About halfway through the game, the men’s team came to play, too. Once there, a lot of the attention was turned to that team. The number of spectators at this game was much more
limited than that at a typical town game. There were perhaps twenty people watching, compared to a frequent gathering of a hundred or more people at the town games. The school game seemed to be less of a social event. Mariana was able to socialize with the people on her team, but it was less of an event. There was only one vendor at this game, for instance, compared to several at the town soccer games.

Community soccer games were a more frequent occurrence, as the teams play several games a week. The community team was not as well established, as some people would play one game and others another. Alvaro never played and Mariana infrequently did. Nevertheless, we would often go watch the games. The location of the games rotated between different communities and occurred various days of the week. Sometimes they would occur in Tamanco, other small communities, or Loreto. Loreto games had the best turnout, as it is the capital of the parish and has the most well established sporting area. Loreto’s population is much larger than most of the other towns’ and there are plenty of bleachers next to the concrete soccer field for people to sit and mingle on. Sometimes at night, people from the community would go to Loreto to socialize with people from the community and surrounding towns as well as play casual games of soccer or volleyball, even when there were no official games occurring. Thus, this sporting area was a well-established social area. We would take motorcycles to the games, with the people driving the motorcycles often having to make multiple trips to bring everyone to and from the games.

The very first night I arrived in Tamanco, we went to a soccer game in Loreto via motorcycle. The soccer stadium is enclosed, with a roof and walls, which is unusual. The bleachers are also uncommon, which help make these soccer games a popular social event. Vendors line the street outside the stadium selling empanadas, french fries, drinks, and other treats. In order to go inside the soccer stadium, you have to cross through a volleyball court. This area also has concrete bleachers, so a lot of people congregate here, too. The area is particularly dominated by men drinking beer. For example, when I walked back out to this area after the soccer games had ended, I was greeted by a very drunk friend from my first time in the town as well as other drunk males he was seated with. This was a common theme during other events in other towns as well. The men often clustered off to the side and became heavily intoxicated from beer. They would share large bottles of beer, each taking turns buying one and passing it around. Occasionally a younger woman might join the group, but that was rare. Asking one of the
younger men in town why he continued to drink despite already being very visibly intoxicated, he responded that refusing drinks from other people was considered rude and made a face indicating how offensive doing so would be. Even my host dad, who was a member of the government and well respected within the parish, would often drink excessively at these games and events in the parish.

Making it into the stadium, I walked with my host family to the section everyone from the community sat at. Alvaro mingled with people from other towns while the majority of people from Tamano stuck together in the same section. This area, however, was more female and kid dominated, though there were some males who sat here, too. Throughout the game, many people got empanadas, which were also what I and my host family ate for dinner that night. We often ate food from one of the vendors at these games for dinner when we went.

The soccer games consist of the women first playing and then the men. They all have to wear special shoes or else they would not be allowed to play. Tamano lost both of their games, which was unsurprising according to Mariana.

The Community:

Tamano is divided into four even sections, where each family group lives. With each passing generation, the land is divided evenly among the children. The homes are generally clustered around the shared, community area. The farm areas are on the periphery of this area, and are connected back to the center via compact, earth paths. In general, the town is deforested. Alvaro reflected on this, saying that when he grew up there were only three houses in the town. Now, due to population growth, there are houses everywhere and the forested areas have been converted to farmland. He notes that this has resulted in a loss of wildlife, too.

About thirteen years ago, the community split from a neighboring town, Diez de Agosto; prior to thirteen years ago these two communities were considered the same town, though the community I stayed in has always been its own community inside of that town. The two towns were in conflict over money given by oil companies, and the town’s government was accused of corruption by people in the community I stayed in. Alvaro suggested splitting the town and was president of the community at the time. He said that there is still corruption in the other town, and this way what they receive from the company is theirs to keep.
The communal area, which is called “El Tamanco,” consists of an internet access building, some benches, a small, concrete building, a little hut, and a concrete area with soccer goals, posts for a volleyball net, and a roof over the area, which is referred to as the “cancha.” The internet building, known as the info center, has a few computers with ethernet connection to the internet. In order to use them, you have to pay for the time spent on them. The connection is slow, and it often stops working for a few days at a time. In general, kids and teenagers congregate in this building. Multiple kids will crowd around one computer, surfing Facebook or playing a game. This building also sells drinks, candy, gum, and yogurt, which kids love to buy. Sofía and Manuel always begged to buy treats from the info center whenever we were in this area. This is also the only building in the community to have air conditioning.

The picture below shows a satellite image of the town. The cancha is circled in the image. The information center is immediately to its right. As the picture shows, most of the houses surround this communal area and are congregated together. The fields extend out from the houses. The main road through town and the parish is also shown; it is the long line cutting through the middle of the image, just below the cancha. The bottom left of the picture shows the petroleum platform that is closest to the community (Figure 6).
The information center was built, in part, using funds from the petroleum company in 2014. Alvaro told me that there was some corruption in building it, as it took a really long time to build. Nevertheless, the center has become an important part of the town. The information center is run by a couple who lives in town, but it is primarily run by the wife. It represents an almost daily interaction between the petroleum company and the community. People gather in the afternoons at night on the benches built using oil money outside of the center. Even though internet access is slow at best, it is a way for people in the community to connect with online resources and represents a significant contribution of oil companies to the community. While its connection to the petroleum industry may not be directly considered every time people use its resources or sit on its benches, people in the community are aware of its valuable addition. When asked if the petroleum company had a positive or negative effect on their life, people pointed to the information center as one of the positive aspects of the industry.
The benches outside of the information center are where a lot of the adult women gather and talk. Other groups of people will also cycle through sitting here, however. I usually saw a group of young, adult men gathered drinking beer somewhere along the periphery of this center. Sometimes a woman or two would join, but this activity was generally male-dominated. A large number of people, men and women, would also play volleyball or soccer. This area also had large speakers, so someone would typically play music.

When I was in the community in 2018, my host family went to El Tamanco nearly every night, and it consistently drew a large portion of the community. This past visit, however, we rarely went. I asked Mariana about this, and she said that people only went there to get drunk. Moreover, every time they go, the kids ask for money to buy treats from the information center, so they tend to stay home now. The few times I went by myself to the town center at night, I noticed it seemed far less crowded than it had the last time I had been there. Yet, one of my friends asked me why I never came, which makes me wonder if the shift in feeling towards El Tamanco was more on the part of my host family or the community in general. That friend is one of the ones who typically drinks, however, which makes me unsure of the general sentiment.

The area still serves as a central meeting spot for events or when something happens within the community. The small concrete building, for example, is used for monthly town hall events. Moreover, one day when I was there, four kids from the community passed out at school. A neighbor alerted Mariana when we were sitting at home, and she rushed to throw on shoes and nearly ran to this center, where a large group of people, mostly women, gathered. They tried to call people who were in the hospital in the city with the kids, and they discussed the situation in general. Thus, while there is some waning importance of this space for my host family, it still retains its meaning as a central meeting location.

In this same school in March of 2019, nearly thirty students were exposed to some toxin and fainted, and it was later shown that fifty-eight students were intoxicated by this unknown substance. Mariana recounted this story after the four students passed out while I was there, showing them both as evidence for sending her kids to private school instead of this public school. She insisted that neither event was unusual, and that the school was full of problems. Members of the community were still unsure of what chemical caused so many students to faint, and it resulted in the school closing for weeks. This school was built under former president, Rafael Correa’s, leadership. Under his presidency, many small, rural schools throughout the
country were consolidated into larger, state sponsored ones. Prior to this large school, each of the rural towns had their own which they sent their kids to. Using money from the petroleum company in addition to government funds, this new school was created in 2014.

The stated purpose of these new schools was to improve education for rural students and help improve educational inequality. Yet, it still has obvious problems, such as the example of fifty-eight students being exposed to a drug. Moreover, for the community I stayed in, the closure of their local school felt like a threat to their culture. They had been teaching their kids about the town’s history and teaching them Kichwa, hoping to revive the culture and language among this newer generation. The state school does not teach either, but still mandated the kids be sent to the new school. The government has, however, just recently allowed kids in the community to be taught within the community, and they will be able to start schooling in the community in the fall semester. Yet, the town no longer has the school building, so the kids will have to begin their education in the info center while a new school building is built. Also, some parents do not want to send their kids to the community school, thinking that they will have a better education in either the new public school or in private school. This is a source of conflict between Mariana and Alvaro, for example, as Mariana feels strongly about sending her kids to private school and Alvaro wants them to go to the community’s school. The conflict represents conflicting values between enforcing the community’s culture and language and a desire for a potentially better education. These differing opinions are important and they both deserve to be discussed. Studying the everyday in one household allows attention to be given to both sides of this argument, as a united front is not needed in this context.

Kids are impacted every day they go to school by the petroleum company; they go to a school built with money from the oil industry. This “donation” to the communities was intended to garner positive press and show the “good” they give the community. Yet, they built this institution against the desires of my host community and its presence threatens the community’s Kichwa culture. The school retains many problematic features, and has not truly helped the communities in the way the companies like to say it has.

**Town meeting:**

Town meetings occur once a month in the small, concrete building in El Tamanco. Alvaro lead these meetings, as president. He went through important community news and
allowed discussion at each of these points. The meetings frequently switched between Spanish and Kichwa, depending on who was speaking. Members of the older generation tended to speak Kichwa while younger people generally spoke Spanish. Even when Kichwa was spoken, however, younger people understood and laughed at jokes made. The meetings represent shared power among everyone in the community and the transparency of decisions made. People are able to raise concerns about topics and have everyone listen to them. The meetings vary in length, but the two I saw lasted a couple of hours.

The kids run around outside during these meetings, and some of the younger adults will also gather just outside the building, often sitting on the information center benches. If a car or motorcycle pulls up, everyone in the meeting will turn their attention to the noise to see who has arrived. Some people will stand up in their chairs, and depending on who it is, it leads to different amounts of distraction.

Tourists:

An interesting aspect of the community is its interaction with tourists. Despite there being many other communities in this area, Tamanco is the only one to host tourists. It is something they are proud of, and they try to show their history and culture to each tourist. People are eager to talk about both, and I was always strongly encouraged to attend and participate in cultural events, such as learning traditional dances.

Tamanco has a dance group, which performs traditional Kichwa dances in competitions throughout the area. When I was there they also performed for a group of students who came from several countries throughout Latin America to learn about the Ecuadorian Amazon and indigenous communities living in the region. For the performances, dancers wear traditional clothing and jewelry and they paint their faces and often carry spears or woven baskets. They present themselves traditionally in these circumstances, which is in contrast to how they normally dress.

All tourists who come to this community do so through a Kichwa man who lives about an hour away by bus and works closely with this town. He helped fund their rural school when it was open and dreams of helping provide better education to them in the future, too. He operates a tourist business and actively works against the petroleum companies; he faced imprisonment in his youth for destroying petroleum machinery but was able to escape jail time by hiding in the
Amazonian jungles. He connects tourists with the community to show them effects of the industry and as place for them to study aspects of the Ecuadorian Amazon. It also helps the community, as it provides economic revenue and allows them to share their culture with more people.

Tourists in the community come for various reasons and stay for varying lengths of time. In 2018, I stayed in the town under the guidance of my school, SIT, in order to do a month-long investigation of the environmental impacts of the oil industry. SIT frequently sends students to live in this community for a month, just as I did. These students pay fourteen dollars a night, which is more than most families make in a day. Thus, they offer a significant economic contribution. Since they are there to work on a project, they tend to stay primarily in the community and spend a lot of time working, rather than mingling with members of the town. Nevertheless, they share meals with their families and are able to attend soccer games or hang out in the shared community space at night. Sometimes, other international students will also come stay in the community. They come for a variety of reasons, but it is my impression that they also work on some project while there, but they often stay for only a week or two.

The community also welcomes tourists who only visit it for a few hours as a stop on a larger tour. This often involves lunch and mingling between the visiting group and various people from the community. These people are often large student groups wanting to tour the Amazon, and this stop lets them learn about Kichwa culture and see a town affected by oil companies. Universities from Ecuador and the United States both participate in these tours.

Despite having tourists relatively frequently, I still received a lot of attention when I first arrived. Some of this I believe was due to how pale I am and my red hair and blue eyes. My host mom even later commented that I am “white, white, white.” The other student who initially went to Tamanco with me, however, also drew a lot of focus. People would stare and kids seemed particularly interested but terrified to talk to us. One of the first afternoons I arrived, I had a small group of kids following me around. They refused to talk to me, even when I initiated the conversation, and they tried to lag behind so I wouldn’t notice them. Thus, it is clear that while the community does welcome tourists and has been affected by them, it is not something intrinsic about the town.

My host dad hopes that tourism will be the future of the town. He dreams of Sofia and Manuel learning English and working in this field. He hopes that they will be able to attend a
university and the town will show its food, dance team, and culture as a way to attract tourists. He believes that the petroleum industry will cease to exist within ten or twenty years and that they do not have enough land for everyone to make a living through farming. He wants tourists to learn about their culture and land, and by already having some visit their community, it is seen as a viable future. Thus, the absence of oil perhaps represents the possibility to be seen in another way, and it offers them opportunities. They will be able to highlight their Kichwa culture instead of showing the impacts of the petroleum company to tourists. Moreover, there seems to be some acknowledgement towards the unattractiveness of the oil companies; it is hard to imagine enough people wanting to visit the area with its presence to support the community. Tourism, therefore, will be possible with its departure. The town is also in the process of building a new building next to the information center where the women can sell hand-made artisanal jewelry, which shows a general vision for the future of tourism within the community.

Conclusion:

When I initially went to live with my host family in 2018, I expected to find stories of destruction due to the oil industry. I was warned by my teachers that some people could not emotionally handle doing a month long project in the area due to the devastation they would see on a daily basis. I was, therefore, surprised by how subtly my host family interacted with petroleum; they rarely consciously thought about it, and when they did, they resisted against classifying it as a positive or negative influence in their lives. Instead, work, town gossip, soccer games, and the kids’ schoolwork dominated everyday conversations and concerns. Days would pass without any conscious recognition of oil’s presence in the area. My host family loved to play and laugh, and they surprised me by how similar they were to every other person I have met. I realized that their lives are rich, complicated, and not easily subsumed under broad classifications. To describe their lives as it only existed in relation to oil would unfairly represent who they are and how they live, negating all of things that define the human condition. Descriptions of their everyday routines, therefore, help increase knowledge and understanding of other important aspects of their lives, such as influences of class, gender, and race. It also depicts a common, human aspect, such as the kids fighting over their parents’ phone in order to watch videos and being amused by the Simpsons. Descriptions that focus primarily on individuals and
households, therefore, allow greater understanding and relatability of indigenous people by helping us to better see them as they see themselves, outside of just the context of oil.

The petroleum industry signifies, all at once, contamination, running water, cancer, trips into Sacha, land constraints, and clippers to help harvest cacao. Its relationship with indigenous people is complex and often contradictory. Framing oil as being either positive or negative is unhelpful, as it oversimplifies the topic and dismisses the experiences of people living in this area. Classifying petroleum as being either positive or negative does not change the fact that people are living in oil dominated areas and only have power over certain things. They must navigate their lives within this context and find a balance within their resistance. Until the petroleum company came into their area ten years ago, they did not have running water. They were able to have the oil company fund a project to install wells next to each of their houses, thereby providing cleaner and more convenient access to water – in part a need that was caused by oil contamination of local waterways. It would be unreasonable to expect people in this community, in this context, to refuse the construction of water wells by the petroleum company.

Traditional narratives, which frame oil companies as being either positive or negative, have little conceptual space for this type of interaction, or the conditions that bring it about. Traditional narratives are so powerful that indigenous people feel immense pressure to act and present themselves in a certain way in order to retain the support of their allies. These narratives have penetrated popular culture, as shown in the documentary *Crude*, and they largely dismiss the context in which indigenous people are living. They expect indigenous people to be in full opposition and behave accordingly, despite life’s assorted pressures. Descriptions of the everyday, therefore, show the inadequacies of thinking about oil as being either “good” or “bad,” and responses to it as being either “good” or “bad.” Understanding and recognizing the context in which indigenous people are living is crucial to fairly representing them and eliminating harmful expectations of their behaviors. As we have seen in the Ecuadorian Amazon, indigenous populations often rise up to protest the processes of resource extraction and its historical legacies of injustice. During other periods, however, everyday life is defined neither by resistance nor acquiescence.

**Notes:**
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1. These personal names as well as the name of the community and parish are pseudonyms.
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