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Livelihood Alterations and Indigenous Innovators in the Ecuadorian Amazon

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Livelihood alterations and Indigenous Innovators in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Abstract. This article approaches livelihood alterations in Indigenous communities of the Ecuadorian Amazon as means of adaptation and resistance to socio-environmental impacts brought along by the expansion of global capitalism. The cases comprise collective Indigenous endeavors in typically capitalist sectors - tourism and mining - illustrated by the experiences of Kichwa community tourism in Shiripuno in the central Amazon, and sustainable mining in the southern Amazonian Shuar community of Congüime (Kenkuim). The aim is to unravel these emerging livelihood strategies in relation to Indigenous ethno-cultural identity. Methodologically, we rely on comparative and ethnographic work in the field with Indigenous actors, and on a theoretical framework anchored in the concepts of innovators, cultural boundary changes (Fredrik Barth), social fields of force (William Roseberry), and intercultural regimes (Fernando Galindo and Xavier Albó). In both empirical cases - Indigenous-controlled tourism and mining - communities are framing their ethnic identity to engage with, and positively reposition themselves in relation to the wider society. We hold that these endeavors must be comprehended as highly innovative, and that indigeneity and cultural boundaries can be

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strengthened by socio-cultural changes toward livelihoods previously considered as "unauthentic" or "non-Indigenous". We also argue that these new livelihood orientations have (purposely) altered gender relations within the communities in benefit of women. Additionally, our cases suggest that cultural strengthening and gender empowerment, among other positive outcomes, requires a nuanced apprehension of indigeneity as a partly floating concept and instrument gaining ground amid the increasing interconnectedness of ancient traditions and capitalist modernity.

Keywords: commoditization of culture; indigeneity; community tourism; sustainable mining; Kichwa Community of Shiripuno; Shuar Community of Kenkuim.

Resumo. Este artigo aborda alterações de meios de subsistência em comunidades indígenas da Amazônia equatoriana como adaptação e resistência aos impactos socioambientais provenientes da expansão do capitalismo global. Os casos compreendem engajamentos indígenas em setores tipicamente capitalistas, turismo e mineração - ilustrados pelas experiências de turismo comunitário Kichwa em Shiripuno e mineração sustentável na comunidade Shuar de Congüime (Kenkuim). O objetivo é elucidar essas estratégias emergentes em relação à identidade etnocultural indígena. Metodologicamente, nos baseamos em trabalhos de campo comparativos e etnográficos com atores indígenas e em um quadro teórico ancorado nos conceitos de inovadores e fronteiras culturais (Fredrik Barth), campos sociais de força (William Roseberry) e regimes interculturais (Fernando Galindo e Xavier Albó). Em ambos os casos empíricos - turismo e mineração controlados por indígenas - as comunidades estão utilizando sua identidade étnica para se engajar e se reposicionar positivamente em relação à sociedade em geral. Demonstramos que esses engajamentos devem ser compreendidos como altamente inovadores, e que a indigeneidade e fronteiras culturais podem ser fortalecidas por mudanças socioculturais em direção a modos de vida antes considerados "não autênticos" ou "não indígenas". Também argumentamos que esses novos meios de subsistência alteraram (propositalmente) as relações de gênero dentro das comunidades em benefício das mulheres. Além disso, nossos casos sugerem que o fortalecimento cultural e o empoderamento de gênero, entre outros resultados positivos, requerem uma compreensão matizada da indigeneidade como um conceito parcialmente flutuante e um instrumento que ganha terreno em meio à crescente interconexão entre tradições ancestrais e modernidade capitalista.

Palavras-chave: comoditização da cultura; indigeneidade; turismo comunitário; mineração sustentável; Comunidade Kichwa de Shiripuno; Comunidade Shuar de Kenkuim.

Resumen. Este artículo aborda alteraciones de los modos de subsistencia en comunidades indígenas de la Amazonía ecuatoriana como medios de adaptación y resistencia a los impactos socioambientales provocados por la expansión del capitalismo global. Los casos comprenden esfuerzos indígenas colectivos en sectores típicamente capitalistas - turismo y minería - ilustrados por las experiencias del turismo comunitario Kichwa en Shiripuno en la Amazonía central, y la minería sostenible en la comunidad Shuar de Congüime (Kenkuim) en el sur amazónico. El objetivo es desentrañar estas estrategias emergentes de subsistencia en relación con la identidad étnico-cultural. Metodológicamente, nos basamos en el trabajo comparativo y etnográfico en el campo con actores indígenas, y en un marco teórico anclado en los conceptos de innovadores, cambios de límites culturales (Fredrik Barth), campos sociales de fuerza (William Roseberry), y regímenes interculturales (Fernando Galindo y Xavier Albó). En ambos casos empíricos - el turismo y la minería controlados por los indígenas - las comunidades están enmarcando su identidad étnica para comprometerse y reposicionarse positivamente en relación con la sociedad más amplia. Sostenemos que estos esfuerzos deben ser comprendidos como altamente innovadores, y que la indigeneidad y las fronteras culturales pueden fortalecerse mediante cambios socioculturales hacia modos de subsistencia previamente considerados como "no auténticos" o "no indígenas". Asimismo, argumentamos que estas nuevas orientaciones de subsistencia han alterado (deliberadamente) las relaciones de género dentro de las comunidades en beneficio de las mujeres. Además, nuestros casos sugieren que el fortalecimiento cultural y el empoderamiento de género, entre otros resultados positivos, requieren una aprehensión matizada de la indigeneidad como un concepto e instrumento parcialmente flotante que gana terreno en medio de la creciente interconexión de las tradiciones ancestrales y la modernidad capitalista.

Palabras clave: comoditización de la cultura; indigeneidad; turismo comunitario; minería sostenible; Comunidad Kichwa de Shiripuno; Comunidad Shuar de Kenkuim.

Introduction

In the face of the extension of destructive extractivism in Amazonian territories, this study deals with alternative strategies, experiences, and livelihood alterations of Indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Our analysis on new Indigenous economic initiatives in the Amazon basin draws heavily on anthropologist

Fredrik Barth's classical study on *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1998) and particularly on his notion of *innovators* within ethnically defined groups. In our Barthian reading, innovators are interpreted as a collective category, alluding to a joint communitarian endeavor to adapt to novel circumstances brought along by the evermore rapid entry of global capitalism. These innovators may opt for one of three principal strategies: 1) assimilating to the "modern" capitalist society, 2) accepting the minority status and abiding to the larger social system by seeking integration with it, or 3) "choose to emphasize ethnic identity, using it to develop new positions and patterns to organize activities in those sectors formerly not found in their society, or inadequately developed for the new purposes" (Barth, 1998, p. 34).

Each of these strategies reverberates in cultural boundary breaking (i.e., cultural weakening) or boundary maintenance (i.e., cultural maintenance). Whereas the first strategy tends to lead to cultural boundary maintenance but a low rank in the larger social system, the second strategy tends to weaken cultural boundaries. The third strategy, however, is conducive to cultural boundary maintenance - or even strengthening - through a positive repositioning of ethnic identity within the larger social system. This study explores this third path articulated by Barth available for ethnically defined groups – namely the purposive engagement in activities and relations with the larger social system as instrumental to empowerment, and the consequent maintenance of cultural boundaries. In the main, however, we perceive the majority of community members as constituting a collective force seeking empowerment on their own cultural terms by partly playing a game determined by outside forces.

The article zeroes in on two specific capitalist sectors - tourism and mining - in which Amazonian Indigenous communities have entered. For the case of Indigenous tourism, we focus on the Kichwa community of Shiripuno in the central Amazonian Napo province. For the case of Indigenous sustainable mining, we analyze the case of Congüime (Kenkuim), a Shuar community in the southern Amazonian province of Zamora Chinchipe, dedicated to small-scale gold mining without using hazardous chemicals or mercury. Reconnecting to Barth's argument that an ethnically-centered strategy of engagement with the outside world is conducive to cultural boundary maintenance and empowerment, our cases also reveal this strategy's potential for gender empowerment within communities. The Shiripuno experience is a project initiated and controlled by the Kichwa-Amazonian women, and, also in Kenkuim, we identify an important degree of female protagonism.

Within the tourism and mining activities of these localities, the collectively understood Indigenous innovators operate within fields marked by power struggle. Following William Roseberry's Gramscian-inspired analysis, we see them as *social fields of force*, that is, local arenas marked by highly complex interactions between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces and by “relations and tensions of center and locality” (Roseberry, 1994, p. 365). The adoption of the term social fields of force allows us to identify local and sector-wise particularities within overall national arrangements of intercultural relations, the latter captured by the conceptualization of *intercultural regimes*. Inspired by sociologist Fernando Galindo and anthropologist Xavier Albó, we comprehend *intercultural regimes* as the interconnected sets of practices, spaces, structures, discourses, networks, and relationships that [within the parameters of global capitalism] reproduce or transform culturally based inequalities and open spaces upon which struggles for equity are performed (Galindo and Albó, 2011, pp. 4-10).

The ongoing expansion of various frontiers (mining and tourism being two of them) brings the inhabitants of Shiripuno and Congüime more closely into the orbit of global capitalism. Highly understandably, much research on the extension of Amazonian capitalist frontiers has focused on the asymmetric encounter between two worlds, including the social and environmental destruction of ancient forms of Amazon existence. This article does not intend to downplay these realities of ethnocidal extractivism but aims at putting the spotlight on the way in which local Indigenous actors (*innovators*) in specific temporal-spatial and contextual settings have entered capitalist sectors more on their own terms. In relation to the innovators as agents of change and continuity (adaptation and resistance), we should emphasize the importance of problematizing communitarian livelihood alterations amidst indigeneity and authenticity. Some critics could argue that these experiences of tourism or mining should not be considered “authentic” livelihood bases for the Indigenous peoples, examples of which would be agriculture, hunting, fishing, and artisan handicrafts. Adopting a more nuanced perspective, we argue for a comprehension of authenticity in line with Barth’s approach to ethnicity or ethnic identity, that is, as dynamic and based on self-identification and ascription. In his words, “if they say they are A, in contrast to another cognate category B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behavior be interpreted and judged as A’s and not as B’s; in other words, they declare their allegiance to the shared culture of A’s” (Barth, 1998, p. 15).

The *aim of this article* is to examine and analyze how and why the adoption of livelihood models that are capitalistic in origin (tourism and mining) have been articulated in relation to ethno-cultural identity in ways that are deemed empowering by Indigenous communities. We will specifically discuss the (re-)construction of indigeneity and authenticity in relation to these livelihood models, as processes of resistance and adaptation amidst pressing socio-environmental changes. The research questions that will guide the analysis are:

- How and why have the livelihood strategies of mining and tourism, that are not traditionally Indigenous, been espoused by Amazonian communities?
- How have these strategies resonated with local perceptions of authenticity and Indigenous culture, and vice-versa? Comparatively, in relation to the above, we need to examine:
- What commonalities and differences can be identified between the experiences of Kichwa tourism and Shuar mining as livelihood alternatives? In discussing this question, we likewise need to problematize the *hows* and *whys* of these similarities and differences.

Methodologically, the most important component is constituted by interview-centered ethnographic and comparative work in the field in Shiripuno and Kenkuim**,** that is, research not only *on* Indigenous actors but rather, as much as possible, collaborating *with* them in relation to the specific research theme (Lembke, Lalander and Galindo, 2020).[4] We have interviewed key actors in the two localities, selected according to their varying functions and experiences in relation to mining and tourism respectively.[5] We consciously decided to most of all focus on communitarian perceptions and interpretations by these Amazonian spokespersons since their viewpoints are often bypassed. In Kenkuim, repeated interviews were mainly held in the 2019-2023 timespan, although the article also leans on fieldwork conducted prior to these years.[6] Our engagement with the Shiripuno community is more recent, and in this article we only include interview and observational material from 2022 and 2023, although the lead author had visited the community before that. We should emphasize that we carried out both individual and group interviews, including more informal conversations. Many of the interviewees were interviewed on several occasions during the research period. Regarding the comparative component, we focused on similarities and differences in regard to the origin and evolution of the two processes under scrutiny, that is, the alteration of livelihood basis in the two communities. Additionally, we lean on previous research experiences of the authors, and on the critical reading of prior literature and application of relevant theoretical arguments and concepts therein, which consequently contributed to the shaping of the methodological approach, In this respect, the employment of a set of specific recognized theoretical concepts (*innovators*, *social fields of force*, *intercultural regimes*), less frequently used for analyzing the Amazonian context, might be considered useful for likeminded scholars in our field.

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[4] Regarding ethical considerations, the research behind this article complies with the ethical principles within humanities and social sciences, also concerning free, prior, and informed consent. The naming of specific actors in the text has their approval.

[5] Beyond informal conversations, seven key actors were interviewed in Shiripuno, whereas we conducted around 40 interviews in Kenkuim. Most of these conversations were recorded and are stored in archives of the lead author. All interviews were carried out by Rickard Lalander.

[6] The authors have published on the Kenkuim case previously, although a lot of new material and perspectives is included in the present text. See Lalander et al., 2020; 2021.

After the above contextualization, the disposition of the text is as follows. First, our theoretical framework is presented in more detail. Thereafter, we present our two cases: community tourism of the Kichwa-Amazonian women in Shiripuno, and the Shuar gold mining experience in Kenkuim. Subsequently, an analytical section is provided, with reconnections to our theoretical framework, followed by some pertinent concluding remarks.

Theoretical Framework

As a consequence of the expanding frontiers of mining, hydrocarbon, agriculture, tourism, etcetera, Amazonian Indigenous peoples have entered a relationship with outside society largely determined by the logic of capitalist commodification and forms of economic organization. This relationship has fostered a novel type of social-economic actors that we, leaning on Barth (1998), label *Indigenous innovators*. These innovators, at times, decisively and purposely step into this scenario, spearheading commoditization processes relying on both maintenance and adaptation of their ethnic identity (Barth, 1998; Robinson, 2008, pp. 220-221; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). On the one hand, transgressing cultural boundaries and engaging in identity commodification will imply alterations in cultural forms and contents. On the other hand, a dichotomization between members and outsiders will be maintained (Barth p. 14), that is, what Barth calls cultural boundary maintaining processes. This is particularly noteworthy in communal tourism where upholding a cultural boundary is fundamental for gaining access to the global marketplace. Accordingly, to a certain degree, the roles they play in local sectoral *social fields of force* (Roseberry, 1994, p. 357) - in our cases centered on tourism and mining - are significantly preconditioned by their ability to preserve traditional ways of arranging human and material relations. In the context of an overall expansion of global extractivist capitalism and confronted by agents of the existing (capitalist) order, Indigenous innovators are at the center of this adaptation-preservation process. The result of these encounters depends on the strategy adopted by the community (innovators) but tends to reverberate on Indigenous identities and views on authenticities often through syncretism (Barth, 1998, pp. 33-35).

Accordingly, although cultural boundaries may be maintained, no cultures, identities, or ontologies are static, not even in the case of Amazon Indigenous peoples, with their experience of relative historical isolation. They change over time, and in the case of Indigenous groups, through their historical encounters with other groups, and other historical processes, such as urbanization, modernization, migration, and access to education (Lalander and Lembke, 2018; 2020). This is in line with Barth's view of ethnic distinctions or cultural boundaries not as requiring the absence of interaction with other ethnic groups or hegemonic cultures, instead cultural boundaries can even be strengthened by such interactions (Barth, 1998, p. 10). Or, as in Enrique Dussel´s reflections around interculturality and transmodernity (2012), most Indigenous populations have not lived in total isolation from the dominant society, but in connection to and, at times, in intercultural dialogue with *the other*. Through these processes, Indigenous populations have occasionally deemed as necessary to redefine Indigenous identity around the modification of livelihoods (Lalander and Lembke, 2018; 2020).

The social fields of force within which innovators operate are inserted into wider structures of inter-ethnic relationships, in this text referred to as the historical-specific intercultural regime, as defined in the introduction. An established intercultural regime co-exists with other regimes centered on, for instance, gender and class relations (Galindo and Albó, 2011, pp. 4-10) and is thus located between local forms of resistance and adaptation (social fields of force), on the one hand, and the top-down expansion of global capitalism, on the other. In relation to the regime level, the issue in the Amazon has historically not been the nature of state presence. Until rather late in the twentieth century (until the era of initial oil explorations and agrarian colonization in the 1960s and 1970s), the Amazon is more adequately described as a region marked by relative state absence. Since then, however, the region has witnessed a significant entry of the state, also implying a shift of intercultural regime, from one based on relative state absence to one of increasing state presence. A similar process of alterations in interethnic relations - or, in our terms, intercultural regimes - was identified by Andrés Guerrero (2010) in nineteenth and early twentieth Andean Ecuador. Although referring to another epoch, one may draw on his reasoning and portray the ongoing repositioning in the Amazon as one in which the intercultural regime was very much in the hands and control of local power holders (mining companies, the military, the Church, or the Indigenous communities themselves) to subsequently being overtaken by the state, accompanied by the extension of capitalism. The speed and consistency of this state expansion - as orchestrator of Amazonian intercultural relations - varies across sectors, localities, and government orientations (e.g., the move from neoliberal to progressive extractivism) and in the way the state presents itself (sometimes showing its punitive muscles, sometimes appearing in its more welfarist functions). Thus, what has occurred in the

Amazon is a transition from one intercultural regime to another, reflected in the increasing territorial expansion of the state. It is in this overall context that the local social fields of tourism and mining must be placed.

The cases selected in this study represent local responses to capitalist expansion and to different levels and forms of state incursion. These responses include varying forms of ethnically-based resistance and adaptation. In both cases - tourism and mining - local Indigenous innovators are re-framing their ethnic identity to engage with, and positively reposition themselves in the wider social system. This process of adapting to the framework of global capitalism does not solely produce alternative local livelihoods but also less confrontational and more *good-for-business* forms of Indigenous resistance, underlining that while Indigenous groups often combat more destructive forms of capitalism (e.g. large-scale extractivism), seeing them as constant adversaries to capitalism is too simplistic.

Regarding alternating livelihood forms and the strategic navigation of the innovators within a rapidly changing world, we should emphasize an initial differentiation between the tourist and the mining sectors. Both groups have entered markets determined by fluctuating demands and supplies which they in the last instance cannot control. However, whereas the inflow of tourists is theoretically endless, local gold deposits will eventually run out. In tourist ventures, the question of marketing the identity (Robinson, 2008, pp. 220-221; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009; Coria and Calfucura, 2012) is pivotal, that is, to “commercialize” ethnic authenticity in line with ancestral culture and livelihoods, but also in correspondence with, to some extent, external perceptions of indigeneity.

In the debates on indigeneity, the Amazonian Indigenous peoples are generally perceived as being “more authentic” than the Andean ones. “In line with contemporary global prioritizing on environmental protection, there is an inclination towards viewing traditional Amazonian inhabitants as environmentally-minded guardians of an increasingly threatened forest. In accordance with that narrative, they are looked upon as “hyper-real Indians” of sorts, that is, inward-oriented, culturally autochthonous and remotely located (Lalander and Lembke 2020, p. 140, see also Valdivia, 2005, p. 285).

In the tourism sector, Indigenous innovators receive minimal assistance by the state. Evidently, all tourism ventures, including Indigenous ecotourism - sometimes used synonymously to Indigenous community tourism (Zeppel, 2006) - are naturally and automatically outward-oriented activities, which obviously bring along different kinds of opportunities, challenges, and risks. All forms of tourism are constituted by power relations, and accordingly risks of domination, subordination, injustices, and abuses (Coria and Calfucura, 2012; Nepal, Saarinen, and McNeal Purdon, 2016), but also possibilities of social, cultural, psychological, political, economic, and environmental empowerment (Mendoza-Ramos and Prideaux, 2018). Furthermore, in our study, the "from below" criterion implied in the concept of innovators is highly important to consider and means that the tourism project and its benefits are controlled by the Indigenous community (Porsani et al., 2023a and b). In the mining sector, on the other hand, innovators are using ethnicity not primarily as a commodity but for backing up a moral argument aiming partly at gaining legitimacy in the eyes of an international community increasingly propagating for sustainability, partly at justifying to the state that the community fulfills the requirements necessary for their mining enterprise to be subject to the processes of legitimization and formalization.

As indicated in the introduction, Indigenous women have played a central role in both our cases. Frequently, women have played particularly important roles as "cultural bearers'' in Indigenous societies (Muratorio, 1998). Following Marisol de la Cadena, women have been viewed as "more Indian" and more rooted in the community. In other words, Social "climbing", social change, and exodus from the community has traditionally been perceived as contradictory, and thus a challenge to that function. However, as observed in her research on female Indigenous market vendors in mid-20th century Cusco, social climbing and, in her case, urbanization and incorporation into the city marketplace, do not necessarily imply loss of cultural identity (de la Cadena, 1995; 2000). Drawing on de la Cadena, the Indigenous women of our cases, as will be seen in due course, can both be viewed as cultural bearers in a traditional sense, and as innovative cultural transformers.[7]

We should also refer to Amazonian epistemic-ontological values, traditions, and beliefs amidst human relationships with the natural environment, in recent debates discussed in terms of good ways of living or *Buen-vivir* (Chuji, Rengifo and Gudynas, 2019; Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017).[8] The Kichwa-Amazonian conceptualization of *Sumak Kawsay* (later translated_ to *Buen-vivir* in Spanish), visualizes alternative ways of comprehending human-nature liaisons, emphasizing that nature should be conceived as being inherently integrated in the social being, and thus not seen as a productive factor (Viteri Gualinga, 2003; Chuji et al., 2019). In Shuar culture, the corresponding ethical-philosophical-ontological conception is *Tarimiat Pujustin*, which according to Shuar intellectuals refers to the same values and principals as *Sumak Kawsay* (Antun Tsamaraint, 2020; Astudillo Banegas, 2020).

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[7] In future research, we plan to emphasize the gender dimension more specifically as a point of departure and more explicitly crucial in the theoretical-analytical framework.

[8] It is important to emphasize that local notions may vary from official versions of *Buen-vivir*, which often have more focus on socio-economic equality and, for some authors, may be seen as a prolongation of a historical top-down strategy with the ulterior motive to co-opt or suffocate Indigenous peoples and their non-permitted struggles and discourses (e.g., Acosta, 2015; Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017; Chuji, Rengifo and Gudynas, 2019). For more on the top-down strategy, see, e.g., Díaz Polanco, 1997; Hale, 2006).

Livelihood alterations in Shiripuno and Kenkuim

Shiripuno

In 2005, the Kichwa-Amazonian women of Shiripuno established an organization with a mission to initiate a communitarian tourism project in the locality, the *Association of Kichwa Women of Shiripuno-Misahuallí* (Amukishmi).[9] Since then, tourism has evolved into being the central livelihood basis of the community. It currently represents the main source of revenues in the community, and it accounts for half of the communitarian workload, agriculture making up the other half (J. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2022).

The Shiripuno community is located on the west bank of the Napo River, within the Sumaco Biosphere Reserve. It is administratively a part of Puerto Misahuallí of the municipality of Tena, in the Amazonian Napo province (Shiripuno, n.d.; Guijarro, Pacheco and Verdesoto, 2018, p. 17; Marcinek and Hunt, 2015, p. 331). Located 3-4 hours by car from Quito, Tena and Misahuallí are natural entry points to the Amazon and have in recent decades evolved into a hotspot of alternative Amazonian ecotourism. Almost 60 percent of the Napo population self-identify as belonging to ethnically defined groups (around 80 percent of the rural dwellers), the largest of which being the Kichwa people (INEC, n.d.; see also Marcinek and Hunt, 2015, p. 331).

The community now known as Shiripuno was previously an ancestral territory of the Huaorani people. The Huaorani abandoned the area in the mid-20th century and from the late 1960s onwards the Kichwa gradually established there. During the Huaorani era the locality was called Auka Parti, but the Kichwa people renamed it Shiripuno, which signifies “God is here”. The community was formally legalized in 1980 (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023b; Guijarro et al., 2018, p. 17).[10] The President of the Shiripuno community (and co-founder of the tourism project), Teo

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[9] *Asociación de Mujeres Kichwas de Shiripuno-Misahuallí.*

[10] In the State´s project of colonizing/populating the Amazon, the *colonos* established in the Tena area, and the Huaorani - who are an Indigenous group accustomed to relative isolation - decided to find another territory in the interior Amazonia.

Rivadeneyra Grefa estimates the population of Shiripuno to be around 250 people, divided into 63 families (2023b). Before the tourism venture, the inhabitants primarily dedicated themselves to agriculture, fishing and hunting, and artisanal gold washing, but some of the men also worked other activities outside the community (J. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2022).

Two interrelated events were particularly important in the run-up to the onset of local tourism. First, the local Kichwa found pieces of ceramics (axes of stone and other works) in a nearby local creek and the subsequent establishment in 2000 of a local archaeological-ethnographic museum. According to Teo, these artifacts dated back to the Inca period. Although it was not initiated for tourist reasons, it was clearly pivotal for communal identity construction (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023 a & c). As Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues, museums are central institutions in the production of history, that is, in selecting "the stories that matter" (Trouillot, 2015, pp. 52, 137). This event, Teo argues, "made me see other alternatives". Many of the artifacts were later donated to a museum in Quito, an initiative that has assisted in presenting Shiripuno Kichwa culture to a broader audience (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023 a). The second crucial event was the discovery in 2002 of a sacred rock. As Teo recalls, it happened during the preparatory work in the site where he had planned to build - but would never finish - his new house. The internal energies buried inside the rock were immediately felt (Ibid.). The event infused an additional spiritual dimension to the emerging tourism idea, despite its external origin, stimulating local adherence. In these years, Teo was married to a French anthropology student and NGO volunteer, together with whom the initial ideas to enter the tourist sector were brought to life (conversations with Shiripuno spokespersons 2022-2023; Guijarro et al., 2018, p. 24).

On what basis did the community believe that tourism would serve as a viable form of alternative livelihood? Most importantly, there was shared awareness that an alternative was needed since the traditional livelihoods were under increasing stress. As former Amukishmi President Janeth Rivadeneyra Grefa argues: "In these times in our country, in the Amazon we are the most affected, we are losing our customs and our language", underlining the particular generational concern that "the young people and children of this generation do not want to speak the Kichwa language". Janeth particularly emphasizes the importance of "teaching our children to take care of the *Pachamama* first, and also the culture that it is important to value, the language and education, that children go to school and have an apprenticeship" (J. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2022). In the words of her brother Teo, the youngsters who go to the cities "no longer want to drink *chicha de yuca*, and they say that 'ah, I am not part of this culture'" (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023a).

The project evidently has a strong gender component. The women had been historically exposed to a severe male-dominated culture which, according to Teo, implied that "the women of the community could not leave the community in search for work or to do the shopping due to the high levels of jealousy within Indigenous culture" (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023a). For Janeth, the project´s central aim "was to encourage women to have their own income, their own work and to be more independent". Similarly, she stresses that the project "was formed by women because we wanted to stop *machismo* and domestic violence, which has been, and still is, very strong in the communities" (J. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2022).

Thus, the new project sought to offer new livelihood opportunities while simultaneously strengthening and disseminating knowledge of Kichwa culture and identity (within the community to prevent the cultural distancing of the youth, but also beyond the community), protecting nature (embedded in the idea of *Pachamama*) and, purposively empowering the women. The Kichwa-Amazonian epistemic-ontological values, traditions, and beliefs amidst human-nature relationships, focusing on principles of Good Life, with references to the conceptualization of *Sumak Kawsay* are emphasized as fundamental by Teo. He adds that in the beginning of the existence of Amukishmi and the tourism venture they had a foundation that included *Sumak Kawsay* in its name, although this foundation was closed by the former government of Rafael Correa (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023b).

In this light, tourism seemed promising and, as it was reasoned, the Shiripuno community had many attractive elements: cultural expressions like traditional dancing, music and gastronomy, skillful handicraft (including the production of artisan chocolate), local agricultural knowhow (the cultivation of cassava, banana, coffee, corn, etcetera), experiences in artisanal gold-washing, and knowledge in medicinal plants and spiritual rituals. It also had the sacred stone. Accordingly, engagement in their own tourism project appeared as a means to tackle problems experienced as urgent through the engendering of a livelihood type conducive to the positive revaluation of traditional or ancestral knowledge and simultaneously to women empowerment.

One of the Shiripuno Kichwa pioneers that still plays an important role in community life is María Celia Grefa, mother of Teo and his sisters Rocío and Janeth Rivadeneyra Grefa, who are also co-founders of Amukishmi and the community tourism project, and current and former president of the Amukishmi association respectively. In Janeth´s words:

> My mother, María Celia, the one who is here [*pointing*], she´s the founder of the project, she's the *Apa Mama,* as we say. She´s the head of the community. She knows the life of grandparents; she´s 89 years old. Until today, she's a midwife. From a very young age she learned to receive babies… She's a natural midwife… She cannot read, she doesn't know how to write, she doesn't know Spanish, but she has her ancestral [knowledges and] customs (J. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2022)

The project formally started in March 2005, when a general assembly was held in the community and the decision was taken to approve the community tourism project. It was envisioned as a platform for the engagement of the entire community, though organized and controlled primarily by the women. Accordingly, all the decisions are taken by women (R. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023). To enact its vision, the *Association of Kichwa Women of Shiripuno-Misahuallí* (Amukishmi) was formed by the Kichwa women in 2005, being "the first organization in the Napo province centered on a project led by women" (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023 a). It was legalized the same year in correspondence with the Ecuadorian Civil Code (Marcinek and Hunt, 2015: p. 332) and has since then most likely inspired other similar initiatives, such as the very closely located *Sinchi Warmi* (strong woman in Kichwa) founded a few years afterwards and around a similar concept.

The men of the community are invited, and contribute assisting with logistics, e.g., canoe transports, jungle guiding, and spiritual ceremonies, beyond, evidently, their agricultural work. Regarding the division of the work within Amukishmi, the women take turns, working for three days and then move to other communitarian activities, normally in relation to agriculture. As Janeth outlines the structure:

> We are made up of 28 to 30 women partners, of which some are doing other work outside the project. But 15 to 16 women are here all the time. We try to give equitable work to families, especially so that women receive the income to be able to feed themselves and their children. We are very happy to share. This idea goes back to the creation of the project on March 6th, 2005 (J. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2022).

The problem with young people leaving for the cities and losing their Shiripuno identity is also dealt with. Marina Calapucha, co-leader of Amukishmi, explains how female teenagers assist the adult women (*las mamacitas*) by being engaged as apprentices, assisting in cultural manifestations such as dancing:

> OK, my name is Marina and I live in the Shiripuno community, and we work with community tourism, CTC [*Centro de Turismo Comunitario*]. Regarding the community, we always work together, men and women, children, young people, and young women. We value our ancestral customs. Day by day we work on this project and thus we get bread for the day for our children, for studies, for the health and disease treatment, for all our people. Yes, the *mamacitas* work, we don't have other jobs… we only work in community tourism…We work artisan handicrafts,

> we offer music, dancing, and show how to prepare *chicha de yuca*, and there *[pointing]* we have a beautiful sacred stone. We offer these activities. We also present the production process of artisanal chocolate. We also go for walks, we have a path where we have some medicinal plants, as also our crops… and we also teach about gold washing and handicraft activities (Calapucha, 2023).

The alternative tourism project also has its setbacks, caused by often unforeseen events, and aggravated by the fact that tourism ventures, such as the Shiripuno one, are generally not covered by insurance or external support. In one sudden blow, years of investments may be in jeopardy or even vanish. One such situation occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic which meant a complete absence of tourists and forced the community to return to other livelihood sources (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023a). As Janeth remembers:

> During the pandemic I dedicated one hundred percent to agriculture, so I thank God for the strength to this day, always to the Pachamama… Now I have my fruits to harvest…. The whole community was also dedicated to gold washing in the river, the whole community went down, we were like ants (J. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2022).

Another disaster was produced by the heavy rains that swept the region by fall 2022, causing flood inundation and the destruction of several important constructions, among them the principal building for lodging the tourists. A necessary sacrifice was needed to solve this problem, since the community solely relies on own means, as explained by Teo:

> We plan to sell a farm, a reserve of 74 hectares. We want to sell this farm and rebuild Shiripuno again… We must do it because Shiripuno has a name. We are (among) the pioneers [of Indigenous community tourism], but, even if you are a pioneer there's no support from the state (T. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023b).

As indicated in the extract above, the lack of external support is an additional challenge - a view that is further elaborated by Amukishmi President, Rocio:

> Recently, one of our buildings was destroyed, and I´m new in the leadership position. Anyway, we try to move onwards. It's only us, the women, and our struggle. We have no help from anyone, from the mayors, the prefects, from the *junta* [parish council], no one, we don't have any NGOs (R. Rivadeneyra Grefa, 2023).

However, despite these recent setbacks and the lack of external including state-led assistance, the Kichwa-Amazonian Shiripuno experiences of community tourism must be seen as a success story in terms of developing a communitarian livelihood model based on tourism that provides incomes to the community while nourishing ethnic belonging and supporting the empowerment of the women in the locality. In the words of Rocio:

> Yes, of course [our project has been a success]. For us, the doors are open to all, we have received foreign, national, and local tourists. We have also welcomed people who come for ceremonies or capacity-building. We don't refuse anyone… We´re all equal and we have received everyone here in the project, it's for everybody. That's how we work (Ibid.).

Kenkuim

Our second case is the responsible gold mining project of the Shuar people of Congüime (Kenkuim in the Shuar language) in the Southern Amazonia. In 2016, the local Shuar association *Kenkuim Kuri Nunka* (*land loaded with gold* in the Shuar language) - with its communitarian mining company *Exploken Minera S.A.* - was granted the state concession to explore, extract and commercialize gold in their territory (410 hectares). This Shuar mining venture was since the start based on values of ecological awareness and communitarian social justice (Ministerio del Ambiente 2016, p. 12; Exploken Minera, 2018; Lalander et al., 2021).

Congüime is situated in the vicinity of the Nangaritza River and the Peruvian border, beneath the Condor Mountain range, in the southern Amazonia, among Ecuador's most important mining regions (including illegal mining), with large quantities of gold underground (Mestanza-Ramón et al., 2022). Administratively, it belongs to the Nuevo Quito district of the Paquisha canton. According to estimates done by Shuar authorities and *Exploken Minera S.A*, the community has around 650-700 inhabitants (Lalander et al., 2021, p. 186),[11] among which many self-identify as Shuar, and others as mestizos. The presence of the Shuar in the locality can be traced back to 1975, with the arrival of the Juank Miik and Samareño families. These families were soon joined by others, including several non-Indigenous Ecuadorians and Colombians, generally entering with mining ambitions (Lalander et al., 2020).

In both its regional and local expressions, the Shuar struggle around territorial, cultural, socio-economic, and environmental values can broadly be comprehended through the logics of resistance and adaptation. We should emphasize the historically fluid nature of Shuar livelihoods and identity, which connects to their mobility over time. This intra-Amazonian Shuar migration, in turn, is related to an intensified entry of new Amazonian actors. Whereas previous contacts with the outside world were primarily orchestrated by missionaries (Juncosa Blasco and Garzón Vera, 2019), the oil boom of 1972 and the accentuation of mining activities following the recent commodity boom opened the floodgates for the representatives of capitalism. Being recognized as an ancestral warrior people and considered by themselves and others as guardians of the forest, the Shuar called for the recognition of historical communitarian practices, mainly centered on agriculture, hunting and fishing, activities that Blanca Ankuash Quizhpe, co-founder and ex-president of Exploken, refers to as "the legacy of our parents" (Ankuash Quizhpe, 2019a).

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[11] Formally, the Shuar people refer to their territorial localities as Shuar centers (*centros Shuar*) rather than communities (*comunidades*). Nonetheless, both in Congüime and elsewhere in the Amazonia, the community concept is used synonymously and more frequently, like we do in this study. Kenkuim is the original Shuar name of the community and Congüime is a Castilianization of Kenkuim. Both names are used by the community locals.

While mining extractivism was largely introduced by capitalist forces, some scholars hold that artisanal gold mining also should be sorted under the category of ancient traditions among the Amazonian Indigenous peoples (e.g., Sacher, 2015, p. 99). Along these lines, Alipio Wajari and other Shuar spokespersons in Kenkuim argue that their ancestors [in other parts of the Amazonia] "had been doing artisanal mining for hundreds of years" (Exploken, 2018). Nonetheless, information on the nature of the Shuar historical relationship with mining and gold diverge. Some authors (such as Sarmiento, 2019) reason that the Shuar generally were unaware of the value of gold and mining. The historical Kenkuim Shuar leader Pedro Juank highlights that small-scale mining ventures since the late 1970s - both legal and illegal - incorporated a local Shuar working force (P. Juank, 2019). Being a relatively young community, Exploken co-founder and former manager Alipio Wajari clarifies that the Kenkuim Shuar have been miners practically since the day they were born (Wajari, 2019b). Nonetheless, agricultural practices still constitute an additional livelihood of several Shuar families (Ankuash Quizhpe, 2019a; F. Juank, 2019). Blanca Ankuash recalls her childhood in the 1980s:

> Our ancestors washed gold and I remember when I was a child my father washed with a wooden plate, not tin, like the ones they sell. They constructed the plates themselves and washed gold on the beaches of the Congüime and Chinapintza ravines. Technology was advancing, and we, the young people, came and learned, discovering that mining has an advantage, a benefit for development *for the [humble] people* [compared to livestock production that takes a long time]…Seeing that in just one day you could end up with one gram of gold, which signifies a lot, making possible to buy basic things, such as salt, sugar, clothes, and shoes… Now *[pointing]*, with the big machines, they are working, recovering, and reforesting… Being from here, we´re aware of what we´re doing, conscious that we must reforest, because

> these are our lands. Not like other people that come for gold-washing and then just leave. But we´re from here and therefore we need to protect the environment (Ankuash Quizhpe, 2019b).

In 2010, police and military forces carried out a successful operation to remove all illegal mining projects, responsible for far-reaching environmental and sociocultural damage in the Kenkuim territory (Ministerio del Ambiente 2016; Lalander et al., 2020). The National Mining Company (ENAMI) was granted the territorial and mining responsibility and in the subsequent concession of the Shuar community included compensation for prior socio-environmental damages suffered by the community. In 2011, The local association *Kenkuim Kuri Nunka* was created and gained the local mandate to formally apply for the license to extract gold in a socio-environmentally and culturally sustainable way.

A subsequent milestone is related to national Ecuadorian politics and the initially progressive administration of President Rafael Correa from 2007. The new Constitution approved in 2008 was unique in recognizing the rights of nature and with an expansion and deepening of the rights of ethnically defined peoples, declaring also that Ecuador was a Plurinational State, composed of peoples and nationalities with their own forms of collective identification, customs, and organization. The Constitution also included references to the Indigenous ethical-philosophical conceptualization of *Sumak Kawsay* (Good living/*Buen-vivir*), giving preference to an ideal stressing harmonious coexistence among humans and with nature (Lalander, 2016; Lalander and Lembke, 2020). Accordingly, while post-2008 Ecuadorian political-economic reality is marked by the intensification of extractivism, the period likewise reflected more environmentally friendly visions. President Correa visited Congüime in July 2012 and declared that the *Kenkuim Kuri Nunka* mining venture would "turn Congüime into a model community […] [and] that Congüime mining will be an example of development" (La Hora 2012, quoted in Lalander et al., 2021, p. 189).

Exploken Minera was born on May 24, 2014 (Exploken Minera, 2018). Initially, 63 community partners represented the Kenkuim families, although due to the occasionally intricate liaisons between ENAMI and Exploken, 37 withdrew voluntarily (Enríquez, 2019; Tanduama, 2019). Amid the contradiction of governmental environmental concerns and intensified large-scale extractivism, the Shuar mining company Exploken emerged as a novel gold mining venture, determined to minimize negative impacts on the ecosystems by not using mercury or hazardous chemicals (Exploken, 2018).[12] Former Exploken President Diego Arizaga reflects:

> The [Shuar mining project] was born for economic reasons, to obtain economic resources to support our families. The initiative arose from the community… For the Shuar culture…it's good to do mining legally…...The Shuar dislike pollution and things done with chemicals... We don't use chemicals or mercury. Earlier, they used that here, during the [era of] illegal mining… [The Shuar] are very proud to do something nice… we'll keep on learning to be able to continue with mining (Arizaga, 2019).[13]

Evidently, the creation of Exploken affected local power structures. The Shuar culture has a traditional system of representation with a maximum spokesperson of the community, the *Síndico* ("trustee"). This position is honorary and, through elections in community assemblies, rotative. A main function of the *síndico* is to represent the community before other authorities (e.g., the State, private enterprises, or, importantly, Exploken), contribute to the resolution of conflicts, and to identify and enhance awareness of priorities and needs of the community. In community relations with Exploken, the *síndico* can decide how to spend the mining royalties destined to the community, and as mentioned in a previous study:

> Although Exploken is a partner of the Ecuadorian State through the concession, the community is the owner of the company, thus functioning as a watchdog *vis-à-vis* the mining operations (Lalander et al., 2021: 190).

The Shuar mining company likewise contributed to modifications of gender roles and structures in Kenkuim. In several interviews in Kenkuim in 2019, 2020 and 2023, Shuar women referred to this transformation in terms of a stronger sense of self-esteem and being more independent economically, changing their relative position both in the family and in the community. Patriarchal structures were accordingly weakened, but also, as some Shuar men mentioned, also family unity, with an increased number of divorces in the community (personal communications in Congüime, 2019; 2023). As indicated, a relatively protagonist role of women is apparent in Exploken, with slightly more women than men in the workforce, in a sector traditionally dominated by men. In the words of Blanca Ankuash Quizhpe, Exploken President between 2016 and 2019:[14]

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[12] Since Exploken lacked funding and machinery for mining operations, they have depended on a system of partner companies, with operators/investors, who receive a share of the profit. These operators are from the adjacent Yantzaza town. Nonetheless, Exploken oversees recruitment and the socio-ecological responsibility in the mining operations (Enríquez, 2020).

[13] We should mention, nonetheless, that due to lack of equipment to separate the gold from the ore, due to lack of equipment Exploken needs to send its gold to a Chinapintza company for the separation process, where mercury might occasionally have been used beyond the Exploken control (Enríquez, 2020; Lalander et al., 2021, p. 191).

> This is the only [mining] company that is Shuar and constituted by women. There are more women than men, also in the workplace. Also, I´m a woman and I´m the president (Ankuash Quizhpe, 2019 a).

As regards the environmental dimensions of Shuar responsible mining, we should emphasize that in the surroundings of Kenkuim, however, small-scale illegal mining still flourishes (Mestanza-Ramón et al., 2022) and large-scale legal mining enterprises continue to operate, such as the Chinese Ecuacorriente venture in El Pangui, and the Lundin Gold project *Fruta del Norte*, close to Yantzaza. Moreover, in Chinapintza, very close to Kenkuim, a lot of mercury, cyanide and chemicals are used in the mining activities, also causing severe environmental degradation in Kenkuim, considering that the Chinapintza ravine passes through Kenkuim, contaminating the soil and rivers:

> [In Chinapintza] everyone uses mercury, and we can't fix that. We cannot move the river in another direction. The Congüime river is without life, it´s an inert dead river, without fish. Throwing cyanide into the river, fish die. From Congüime and downwards, the fish are practically worthless, there´s research on that by the technical university [of Loja]. They caught fish, and all the larvae, concluding that the fish that consumes mercury the most is the "blind fish" (*pescado ciego*), as we call it (Wajari, 2019b).

Reconnecting to the cultural dimensions, also related to the local mining history. Cultural components and references to ancestral Shuar values and practices appear less central in Kenkuim, compared to Shiripuno. These differences have a lot to do with historical conditions and the sectoral characteristics. Mining activities evidently do not automatically include cultural elements in the daily operational practices, as being the case in Indigenous tourism. Moreover, regarding the ethical-philosophical-ontological conceptualization of *Tarimiat Pujustin,* the Shuar apprehension of Good Life, several Shuar locals seemed unaware of this concept, whereas others expressed familiarity with the State policy of *Buen-vivir*, as expressed in the national development plan. Notwithstanding, those who spoke and understood Shuar well, could relate to the idea of *Tarimiat Pujustin* (conversations in Congüime, 2019-2020).

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[14] Since the creation of Exploken in 2016, two of its three presidents have been Shuar women, Ankuash Quizhpe and her cousin (President since 2021) Sonia Quizhpe Jintiach.

Furthermore, as reflected by Exploken co-founder and former manager, Alipio Wajari, the mining business has triggered individual opportunism. Both before and during the Exploken era, there have been clientelist connections between the illegal miners and some (male) community members, including a few examples of what Wajari views as corruption of some Shuar communitarian authorities in their relationships with locally powerful miners, with implications in the attitudes of these few community leaders towards the Shuar mining venture. Such events have added to alterations in communitarian unity and local Shuar cultural values. Wajari adds, in agreement with Sarmiento [2019] that the Shuar have traditionally not been interested in mining and the value of gold (Wajari, 2019a and b). Adding to this, during the era of illegal mining in Kenkuim, many Shuar families rented their lands to the miners, and the (male) Shuar day-laborers could make around $40 a day, which is a lot compared to the basic salary ($394 per month in 2019) of the recent Exploken period (conversations in Congüime, 2019-2020).

Rounding off, already in 2019, it was apparent that the Kenkuim gold era was coming to an end, with most of the available gold already extracted from the deposits. In *Kenkuim Kuri Nunka*, Exploken and broadly in the community, many Shuar expressed concerns regarding the future. As expressed by Exploken partner Tania Tanduama:

> Mining is running out and I think about what will happen when that mining ends. Where to go? That's my concern because mining is my livelihood, I don't possess any land (Tanduama, 2019).

The Exploken engineer, Ramiro Enríquez, who has been crucially involved since the beginning, clarifies that (in early 2023) they are concluding operations in the last two small gold pits in Kenkuim:

> We hope for another project, we want to go a little further, beyond this river, a kind of approval first, and if we see that there is at least some profitability we´ll continue. Otherwise, we withdraw from there definitively. We are allied with ENAMI and made a letter of intent to see if we can enter some project of strategic areas (Enríquez, 2023).

In retrospect, despite having occasionally criticized Exploken during his time as *Síndico* of the Shuar community, Fausto Juank believes that the Indigenous mining experience of Exploken has contributed positively to Kenkuim:

> Exploken, well, they are Shuar brothers, who have made good things… They're people who have contributed, particularly during that pandemic and all that. We have worked together with the Exploken, and they have been in solidarity with the people who were locked up… Maybe they will still have mining opportunities [in

> other places]. They should do so with good visions, just as they behaved in Congüime… Of course, Exploken's work has been positive for Congüime. They created their own company, their own source of work, and they have machinery. For me that's magnificent (F. Juank, 2023).

Comparative Analytical Reflections on Livelihood Alterations in Shiripuno and Kenkuim

Neither tourism nor mining is perceived as natural or authentic livelihoods for the Amazonian Indigenous peoples. Indeed, the emergency of Indigenously controlled tourism and mining in the Amazon must be historically contextualized in relation to the centuries-long capital-driven endeavors of natural resource extraction, expansion of the capitalistic frontier, and the cultural assimilation of Indigenous groups (Sacher, 2015; Villavicencio, 2020; Kröger, 2022). Accordingly, the transit of outsiders in Amazonian Indigenous territories has generally caused destructive implications from the perspective of Indigenous peoples. These negative implications have, however, not been accepted passively. Instead, Indigenous peoples have engendered struggles in mutually constitutive resistance and adaptation processes. The welcoming of outsiders, now as tourists, or the reformulation and embracing of small-scale mining in Indigenous territories must be understood as part and parcel of these resistance-adaptation processes. Based on our findings, and from a Barthian perspective, they must be apprehended as highly innovative and conducive not only to cultural boundary maintenance but also including additional empowerment benefits.

When Indigenous tourism and mining evolve into important livelihood sources, they enable local groups to remain in, and exercise control, over their territories (Porsani et al., 2023a). Interestingly, both Shiripuno and Kenkuim have been inhabited by the Kichwa and Shuar people respectively in relatively recent times. However, this does not imply Indigenous peoples' weaker connection to these places and is in fact in line with mobility patterns of Amazonian Indigenous peoples and their wider comprehension of territoriality (Lalander and Lembke, 2018; 2020). Furthermore, both cases emerged amidst worsening prospects for traditional livelihoods (e.g., hunting and fishing), largely due to the environmental consequences of extractive enterprises in their territories. As explained by spokespersons of both projects, these local hardships contributed to distancing members physically and culturally from their communities. Connecting to broader challenges of Indigenous groups to deal with the inter-generational cultural identity loss, especially in Shiripuno the livelihood alteration created incentives for the younger generation to stay in the community, particularly for teenage girls. Consequently, by engendering more economically viable livelihoods, the projects sought to serve as alternatives to previous routes to social climbing and communal escape which frequently exposed the young generation to the process of mestizaje.

More broadly, thus, beyond being connected to the territorial dimension, these new livelihoods enable Indigenous peoples to sidestep super-exploitation to which they have been inserted in hierarchically segmented labor markets. Indeed, in conventional tourism and mining, local (Indigenous) labor is usually incorporated at the lower ranks with poor working conditions (Steel, 2013). Consequently, by staying in the territory and crafting livelihoods in their everyday lived spaces, these communities, and particularly women, merge the productive and reproductive functions of capitalist labor relations, which are split not only in the spatial but also in the gender dimension (Mills, 2003).

Reconnecting to de la Cadena, our cases indicate that, despite being seen traditionally as cultural bearers, with less contacts beyond their community, livelihood alterations might create possibilities for women to perform a more central and outward-oriented role, i.e., a cultural adaptation with emancipatory elements, including a relative economic empowerment vis-a-vis their spouses. To varying degrees, they are still cultural bearers, but for a culture in transformation. Particularly in the case of tourism, by making a living by sharing not only the everyday reproductive realm, largely controlled by women, but also by emphasizing traditional ancestral knowledge, women acquire economic and political preeminence in these new livelihoods. These findings coincide with Florence Babb´s research on Indigenous women and tourism. As she argues, frequently Indigenous women are perceived by visitors as “the most culturally authentic members of their communities” amidst communitarian tourism ventures and they might thus have economic advantages vis-à-vis men and may, accordingly, achieve a higher status in their local societies” (Babb, 2012, pp. 46-48).

More broadly speaking, the community might likewise find it economically advantageous to place women in more leading and visible positions. As articulated by the Kichwa of Shiripuno, community tourism was intentionally crafted having in mind not only the empowerment of the Indigenous group but specifically the empowerment of women in ways that defy patriarchy and associated gender-based violence. Likewise, the Kenkuim Shuar stress that Indigenous mining contributed to the socio-economic and psychological empowerment of Shuar women and to countering gender stereotypes in the community. Gender relations that cross-cut communities and interact with capitalist productive structures illustrate the complex social field of forces with its various fronts for counter-hegemonic endeavors in both localities.

Moreover, the innovative value of these endeavors includes the explicit, though not completely overlapping, use of indigeneity. In the mining case, ethnicity was a key factor underpinning not only local mobilization illustrated in the creation of the Shuar association and successively the Shuar mining company, but also the positive external response illustrated in the approval of the mining concession. In the tourism case, the conscious attempt to strengthen and disseminate knowledge of Kichwa culture and identity was key in the genesis of the project. Furthermore, by crafting livelihoods based on their own tourism initiative, they have been able to refocus their everyday lives on exercising and promoting their indigeneity. In other words, they daily exercise traditional practices, sharing and commodifying ancestral Kichwa knowledges.

These local level alterations must be understood within the wider scenario of a changing intercultural regime, from a neoliberal one that opened the field for savage extractivism, to one in which the state took on a more regulatory and redistributive role. At least discursively, the new intercultural regime enhanced environmental concerns and Indigenous rights, albeit similarly amidst continued extractivism. Nonetheless, this "progressive" transformation at the national level of politics affected in different ways the agency of Indigenous innovators in the local social fields of Amazonian tourism and mining. Particularly in the Shuar case of socio-environmentally sustainable mining, the new intercultural regime functioned as a door-opener, although it was primarily the outcome of community level Shuar agency. By advancing responsible mining on Shuar terms, in benefit of the community, thus defying global capitalism, self-esteem and a sense of pride deepened among the Kenkuim Shuar. The Exploken project and the *shuarization* of mining - based on communitarian ethical, socio-environmental, and socio-economic values - transformed their status from victims of (illegal) extractivist capitalism to Indigenous innovators of sustainable mining.

Although previous studies are divided into the implications of Indigenous cultural commoditization in tourism settings (Coronado, 2014), we argue, based also on evidence from cases elsewhere (Porsani et al., 2023b), that such commoditization processes (clearly illustrated in the tourism case but, as noted, also present at least in the origins of the Shuar mining project) are key components in the innovative paths along which ethnic identity assists in developing new positions and an altered local power balance. Accordingly, the emphasis on culture in these new livelihoods is not only instrumental for liberating Indigenous peoples from exploitative forms of commoditized labor relations, as indicated above, but also perceived by the Kichwa and Shuar, as enhancing pride and positive (re)valuations of their indigeneity, including ancestral knowledge, culture, and values. The implications of such (re)valuations should not be understated.

In both cases, collective engagement centered on indigeneity contributed to reinforcing social cohesion, and the sharing and promotion of indigeneity with "others" – more explicitly and systematically in the tourism case, but also intrinsic to the mining case – counteracting the mainstream hegemonic logic that has engendered systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples. Accordingly, key to understanding the innovative dimension of these Indigenously controlled projects is the creation of intercultural social fields of force where Indigenous actors can engage in collective undertakings anchored in a common, though not fixed or rigid, indigeneity to (re-)create livelihood alternatives that are conducive to positive (re)valuations of Indigenous culture.

Concluding Remarks

Based on a theoretical framework with three principal concepts - Indigenous innovators, social fields of force and intercultural regimes - this article has scrutinized the outcomes of livelihood alterations of the Kichwa community of Shiripuno and the Shuar community of Kenkuim in the Ecuadorian Amazon. We specifically focused on the (re-)construction of indigeneity and authenticity in relation to these livelihood models. Our cases clearly manifest processes of empowerment in which local ethno-cultural identity to some extent has been adopted to a new social field of force generated by an expanding capitalist frontier, but also has maintained substantive elements rooted in the protection of environment, solidarity, and ancient cultural traditions.

The concept of Indigenous innovators is particularly useful for identifying this process of resistance and adaptation, and likewise reveals that the more individualistic understanding of Barth must - in our Amazonian cases - be accompanied by a more collectivist and gender-conscious dimension. That is, women play a more outward-oriented role as innovators, but in concert with the community in its entirety. These new livelihood orientations illustrate both the fluidity and the complexity of the authenticity dimensions of indigeneity, as well as the somewhat counterintuitive conclusion that indigeneity and cultural boundaries can actually be strengthened by socio-cultural changes towards livelihoods previously considered as "unauthentic" or "non-Indigenous".

The alternative small-scale mining project of the Shuar in Kenkuim has a more complex relationship with external capitalist power structures and is more inserted into the contradictory politics of the new intercultural regime. The strategies employed by the Indigenous peoples in the social fields of force of mining and tourism are affected by three significant circumstances. Firstly, being a non-renewable resource, gold mining is temporary, whereas tourism activities have a longer time-horizon. Secondly, whereas the promotion of Indigenous values by the new intercultural regime most likely has had positive effects on community tourism, the contradictory governmental stance on environment and extractivism has clearly complicated the project of local sustainable mining. Thirdly, references to culture are natural in the case of Shiripuno tourism, whereas cultural attributes are present but more implicit in Shuar mining.

Overall, however, the two cases manifest several significant commonalities. Within these social fields of force, women's empowerment and the alterations in gender relations constitute one of the most important outcomes of the Shiripuno and Kenkuim experiences. Simultaneously, in the role as principal boundary breakers, they have conserved their significance as upholders of local culture. Most importantly, both cases demonstrate that Amazonian indigeneity is a floating concept gaining ground amid ancient traditions and capitalist modernity, a social field of force in which Indigenous innovators are pivotal.

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