

**Relatives of the Living Forest: The Social Relation to Nature Underlying Ecological Action
in Amazonian Kichwa Communities¹**

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This chapter examines the social relation to nature underlying indigenous thinking about the forest in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The topic has gained international prominence in recent international forums such as the United Nations December 2015 Conference on Climate Change. In these settings indigenous groups led by the Kichwa community of Sarayaku have formulated their arguments for keeping petroleum underground in native religious terms. They argue that the forest is a living social being, “*Kawsak Sacha*,” sacred to native people. This being, they assert, protects biodiversity by ensuring balance between species. Oil or large-scale mineral extraction offends the forest causing it to retreat or die. This in turn results in the collapse of biodiversity.

Indigenous people in the Ecuadorian Amazon have argued that to flourish the forest must be nourished by the social relation that the native community has maintained with it over centuries. Hence for the good of the planet the forest should be left in native hands and petroleum extraction banned. If this happens native people will maintain it for the good of the planet. In one way or another the international community should recognize and respect the native community for the work they do in preserving the forest that gives life to all. These appear to be key ingredients of the “the *Kawsak Sacha* Proposal.”²

Formulated in this way the Kawsak Sacha Proposal presents a scenario of convergence between the goals of environmental activists such as AmazonWatch, who want to keep oil underground, and those of Native religion. A recent AmazonWatch post quotes Patricia Gualinga, a primary spokeswoman for the Kawsak Sacha movement as saying “it's only now that scientists are confirming what our medicine people have been saying for millennia.” Immediately following the quote is an AmazonWatch affirmation: “That science is unequivocal—fossil fuels must stay in the ground...to avoid ...climate chaos” (Amazon Watch 2015). NGOs like AmazonWatch are primarily concerned with slowing global climate and preserving forest. They do not raise the question of how the infrastructure Amazonian communities need will be funded without petroleum extraction. Instead their literature implies that Amazonian Indians could live sustainably off their forest forever, if only the outside world would leave them alone. The convergence is mutually beneficial because it allows native communities like Sarayaku to gain the backing of international environmental organizations such as AmazonWatch for their local resistance to extraction in their territory, while allowing AmazonWatch to claim that Amazonian medicine men back their global strategies for fighting climate change.

While I am sympathetic with the Kawsak Sacha movement, equating the philosophy and goals of environmentalist NGOs with the indigenous social relation to nature is unfortunate for several reasons. First, it denies the complex political pluralism of the indigenous population. Secondly, it oversimplifies and conceals the distinctive beauty of the indigenous social relation to forest. Finally, it allows the Kawsak Sacha movement to be dismissed by its opponents as a creation of foreign activists.

Before moving forward it will be useful to briefly describe this complexity. In the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Amazon, communities opposed to extraction now confront pro-extraction governments elected with a majority of indigenous votes that have enshrined the rights of nature in their constitutions. Article 71 of Ecuador's 2008 Constitution reads "Nature, the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth), where life is realized and reproduced has the right to be respected in the integrity of its existence including the maintenance, and regeneration of its vital cycles, structure, functions, and evolutionary processes" (Asamblea Constituyente 2008; translation mine). Although the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia agree to share the goals of preserving the environment and decreasing carbon emissions, they disagree with those who oppose extraction as the cause of environmental degradation as well as on the strategies for correcting it.

The administrations currently governing Ecuador and Bolivia (Alianza Pais and MAS respectively) see poverty as the primary threat to the environment. They take it for granted that population increase has rendered subsistence living off the land unsustainable. Continuing this lifestyle under the conditions of modernity leads to overuse of forest resources resulting in poverty. In their view the only practical way to combat these threats is to extract the oil from under the forest, using environmentally friendly technology, and then invest its wealth in the infrastructure and alternative jobs needed to sustain their populations.

These governments and the environmentalist NGOs also differ on how they understand the relation of indigenous communities to the state. Foreign NGOs tend to portray Amazonian

communities using a North American model of sovereign Indian nations resisting a non-indigenous state in defense of sacred lands. By contrast the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia see the indigenous population as the core of the nation. Ecuador is a small country with a physical area about the size of Arizona. From the perspective of the government the question is not whether a “white” state can take “Indian” oil but whether a small local community can deny a significantly indigenous nation access to the natural resources it needs to end poverty and preserve its environment. In their view allowing local communities to veto the extraction of natural resources is unworkable. Although no local community wants an oil well in its back yard, all need the government services that can only be funded by extraction. Because Bolivia has an Aymara president and the governments of both countries were elected with a majority of indigenous support, it is unrealistic simply to identify the indigenous position on extraction with the radical opposition to extraction advocated by some.

Equating the Amazonian social relation to nature with the goals of environmentalist NGOs also allows the Kawsak Sacha movement to be more easily dismissed by its opponents, as shown in the following example. The Kawsak Sacha movement seemed to burst onto the Ecuadorian national scene in the fall of 2013. In August of that year President Rafael Correa had announced the opening of the Yasuni National Park to petroleum exploration. Almost immediately, sixty Amazonian women, many from remote areas, marched on the capital to ask the governing assembly to stop the proposed drilling. Patricia Gualinga, spokeswoman for the group, presented the Kawsak Sacha Proposal to Congress and the nation for the first time. The *Washington Post* published a photo essay featuring fifteen photographs of the women entitled “Guardians of Life:

Indigenous Women Fighting Oil Exploitation in the Amazon” (November 3, 2014). On the bottom of each woman’s photograph was a note handwritten in her native language. “My name is Hueiya. I fight for my community and for the children in the future to not suffer and live in peace and to breathe clean air...and drink clean water.” The fact that these quotes were hand written in the native language suggested their direct authenticity. The title implied that these women represented all Indian women and that in their fight against extraction the indigenous people were guardians of life itself. This article in *The Post* was similar to that of other articles in the international media that simply identified the Kawsak Sacha movement with the Indian defense of life and the environment.

Although applauded internationally President Correa simply brushed off the women’s demands as manipulated by romantic activists he called “infantile environmentalists.” By this he meant environmentalists who oppose extraction without offering a viable economic alternative. In his address to the nation President Rafael Correa stated that opening up the Yasuni Park was the hardest decision of his presidency (“Cadena Nacional” 2013). He fully expected a majority of the indigenous population to support him because they knew that the jobs and infrastructure it funded were needed to sustain Amazonian communities together with their environment. He was partly right. Since 2013, the conflict over petroleum extraction has steadily escalated, splitting the Amazonian Indian movement in two.

In the pages to follow I will argue that the indigenous social relation to nature informs the thinking of a broad spectrum of indigenous Amazonians who, for practical reasons may variously

align themselves with one side or another. Nevertheless the underlying assumptions of this Amazonian social relation to nature differ from the philosophies of both the ecological NGOs and Alianza Pais on important issues such as 1) what the forest is and how it functions; 2) how humans are related to the forest; 3) who should represent, or benefit from the forest; 4) what threatens the forest; and 5) what actions can be taken or avoided to ameliorate that threat. In making this argument I will draw on Kichwa language interviews with rural people who are not academics or activists. Instead they narrate their own experience of living in social relation to Amazonian forest. A more nuanced examination will show that the Kawsak Sacha movement is indeed deeply rooted in traditional Amazonian thinking, but so too are other groups who for various reasons support the government.

In analyzing the indigenous social relation to nature I am not starting from scratch. A number of now classic studies, including Descola (1994), Brown (1986), and Bastien (1978), as well as more recent works such as Kohn (2013), have portrayed the indigenous relation to the forest in social terms. Although I will draw upon my own Kichwa language interviews, what I will develop here builds on their understanding.³ In constructing my argument I will use testimonies from communities distant from roads as well as from others living on highways where the forest is more threatened.

A. Social Relation to Nature in Montalvo

Representing the more remote communities are two narrators from Montalvo, Eulodia Dahua and her brother David. Montalvo, on the lower Bobonaza River, is a mixed Kichwa Shiwiar/

Achuar community with relatively intact forest and relatively little outside influence. In these interviews the unity of the forest is not stressed. Instead, there are multiple social actors who are local owners of species. In one of the videotaped interviews I conducted, Eulodia Dahua explained how each species is regulated by its own chief called a *kuraga* or *amu*. “My father used to tell me that the woolly monkeys, squirrel monkeys, and howler monkeys all have *amus*... The white lipped peccaries have their own *amu*. The collared peccaries have their *amu*... The toucans have their *amu* too” (Dagua 2013).

These chiefs of animals are not portrayed as altruistic beings managing their populations to maximize global biodiversity or food security. Instead they often act in partisan ways. The *amus* keep their “people” in corrals like pets. From there they let them out in measured numbers and then bring them back in again. Although these animals are clearly locked up for their protection, the chiefs of the animals are also protecting their property. When I asked Eulodia how this system of corrals affects the availability of animals, she attributed their present relative scarcity to the *amus*’ reaction to human activity in the past. “If there hadn’t been people, the animals would probably be all around us,” she said. However,

Since the people kept killing and killing them, the *amus* locked up all their animals. When there is no human noise they say they let out their animals. But when they open [their corrals] and people do harm [to their animals]... Just like when people try to steal from us we lock up our animals. In the same way they locked up their animals. They called them inside.

According to Eulodia, when the hunters approached the part of the forest “where there is lots of game, they would hear the sound of a door slamming...*tulún*.” They would look around and “all the game would be gone...Nothing. No animals at all. When the hunters would leave the gates would be opened again.” Where these *amus* are present the animals, birds, fish, and fruits are abundant. Where they are absent, the animals are gone.

Although the *amus* hide their animals from strangers, they provide this abundance to people they consider to be their friends or “relatives,” often taking partisan sides in disputes between rival families. On several occasions Kichwa men engaged in guiding forest visitors have told me that the reason their tour groups don’t see animals is that rival Kichwa guides had convinced the spirit owners to temporarily take the animals out of circulation in order to ruin the business of their competitors. On the other hand, sometimes a hunter kills a rare animal thought to be locally hunted out. The rare appearance of this animal is attributed to the hunter’s friendship with the species owner who let the animal out as a gift.

To understand this partisan quality of the forest it will be helpful to explore the nature of these friendships. Over several generations the people who live in an area become relatives (*ayllullashka*) of this living forest. These relationships are not with something leafy in appearance, but with mysterious humans. Although they may have an animal or plant body, the forest *amus* can also appear as attractive men or women. Their intimate relations to local people can be variously understood as a same-sex sibling relationship, a heterosexual relationship of attraction, or cross generationally as grandparent, parent, or child. Motivated by family feeling,

the forest gives its game and fruits to sustain these intimates. As friends of the forest, it is only they who mediate the forest's relations with other unrelated human communities.

To better understand this social relation to nature, I now turn to examining how this bond of friendship is created and maintained. By his own account David's relation to the forest is representative of an older time when hunting was the primary daily activity for men. David came into a relation to the forest as most boys did, through his father Tomás. David recalls when his father took him on an overnight hunt for the first time. When they reached their hunting grounds, his father let out a joyous shriek from the top of a hill and then blew a trumpet blast through the barrel of his shotgun. David was shocked. "Why do you trumpet like that?" he asked. "The game will hear you and go away." "No," his father said,

I am trumpeting so that my friend [the forest *amu*] will hear me. He told me in a dream... You should arrive trumpeting and shouting... Then I will open the gate and let my chickens out of their corral. I will also open the door of my pig corral... So that is why I trumpet when I arrive, son.

After Tomás Dagua had shouted in greeting, he left David alone and went out to hunt. David had the sense that they had come to the home of a powerful but invisible friend. The toucans and guans his father would shoot were this man's chickens. They would not be in the trees by accident. They had been let out especially for them.

When it got dark, David lit a torch and went out to help his father carry back the game. But he had not gone far when he became violently sick. "I almost died. Headache! Fever!" David

explained why he thinks this happened: “To become friends, the forest man first tests you. When you arrive at the place where the game is he makes you sick. He hits you with his power.” In the morning, David’s father built a fire, fanned his son with smoke, and sent him to bathe in a nearby creek. Then he blew tobacco on him. After half an hour he felt better. “When my friend passed by you, you were hit by his smell,” his father told him. “That is why you got sick. When the forest is going to become your friend it tests you,” he explained. “I won’t always be with you. One day I will be gone. You will have a wife and you will be able to hunt on your own.”

Two things strike me about this incident, which need to be examined together. The first is the father’s responsive friendship with the forest. Although one would expect a hunter to be quiet, Tomas Dagua’s relationship to the woods is boisterously joyous. He shouts in greeting. I have walked in the forest with David’s family many times. Although attentive, they often keep up a humorous banter with the forest, comparing each other to animals and plants they encounter. On one occasion, as we were entering the forest, toucans began to sing. “They are singing because they know we are coming,” one woman said. “All three of us are toucan singers.” With that each woman responded to the toucans singing in turn. This kind of responsive interaction with the forest is understood in terms of friendship. It comprises a kind of social visiting that the forest enjoys.

Secondly, if the forest is his father’s friend, why does it make David so sick? The sickness is important because it shows that the forest has a power that prevents strangers from approaching it. *Wayrashka*, the wind sickness that hit David, is something every Amazonian child

experiences. It happens when the breath of the forest enters the body of someone who is a stranger to it, causing vomiting, dizziness, fever, and potentially death. It is not that the smells of the forest winds are noxious or toxic in themselves. On the contrary, they are beautiful smells. The problem is rather that the children's bodies have still not become "adapted" (*yacharishka*) to the forest.

The smell of the forest wind is the distinctive odor of its breath, which comes from the composite makeup of its body. The forest body is in turn a network of plants and animals, who have become adapted to each other over time such that they share a common make up of air, water, and nutrients that circulate through them. This forest body is believed to have something like an immune system that, through its breath, expels foreign bodies not adapted to its own. When children first begin to accompany their parents, the forest winds repel them, invading their bodies and making them sick. Their parents then blow, sing and fan their own forest-adapted wind into the children, causing them to recover. Gradually, by surviving the sickness, their bodies are changed in some permanent way that gives them greater affinity with the forest.

This however is just a beginning. To build a social bond with the forest, a person must continually adapt their body to the forest through a physical communion that I will call "shared body." This is achieved progressively by eating, breathing, and drinking a broad array of local plants and animals, until the composition of the body approximates the biodiverse makeup of the forest. This gives the body the breath (*samai*) and smell (*asnai*) of the forest. Furthermore, it requires avoiding foods that are foreign to the forest, such as garlic, onions, sugar, commercial

alcoholic drinks, or excessive salt, because these foods give the body the foreign smell of the city. Just as the forest smells cause an unaccustomed person to get sick, so too might these foreign city smells cause the forest to recoil and withdraw. When the body becomes like the forest (*yacharishka*), the physical boundaries between body and forest become fluid and the person is then open to heightened social relation with the land and its species. The forest people (*amus*) appear in dreams to become relatives (*ayllullashka*). This is what later happened to David at the time of his father's death.

“Then my father died. He died.” Tomás Dagua was so intertwined with the forest that when he died the entire forest is said to have gone into mourning. The birds were silent for months. For a time David avoided the forest. “For five years I did not walk in the forest, thinking I would be overcome with sadness if I saw the paths where he walked, that he had cut, where I had walked with him.” Because his father's presence was fresh in these paths, they could cause him to be overcome with grief and so to sicken and die. But after a period of five years, David did return to the forest. By this time his father had become integrated into the forest and accompanied him as a mediating presence. The narrative continues as follows:

When the five years were up, I went walking [in the forest] and arrived at his [hunting] place...Before going to sleep, I shouted on that hill in the same way that my father had shouted and trumpeted. Then as I slept, two men came to me in a dream. One was wearing a vine headband...Another came behind him. Together they came and greeted me. “Why have you come?” I asked in the dream. “I

thought my friend had come,” he told me, “So I came to visit.” “Your friend has died.” I said. Your friend has been dead five years.

“So who are you?”

“I am his son. Tomás’ son.”

“Ooh. So that’s it. My friend used to shout and play like that when he came. Is that my friend who has come after all these years? I wondered. So I came to see. Now we would like to make friends with you. When you come we will come to visit.”

“Yes I said. To become relatives.” My heart jumped like this tag tag tag tag.

“Now let’s become friends,” he said. So we became friends. “Come to visit me, friend” he said.

What is especially important here is that David’s relation to the forest is inherited from his father through a generational chain. As an inheritance, his relation to the forest is also a relation to his father’s memory. To maintain this relationship he must visit the forest regularly, usually in the process of hunting. This daily walking in the forest is now a communion not only with the familiar paths but with his father and grandparents, who walked them before him. When David and his siblings walk in the forest now, they do so in the company of their father’s memory and as their father’s representatives. They sing his songs to the birds and animals. Every time they do so, they first stop to remember him and other ancestors present in the song. When the forest hears them, it welcomes them as friends because they are Tomas’s children singing his songs. Viewed from another angle, it is the forest that keeps Tomas present with his children. It is in the forest

that they feel his company. In some way their father is that forest now. This is what it means to be related to a forest as a child to a parent.

When David goes into the forest the animals that approach him are understood to be the gifts of the forest. Because they are shot on the paths where his father's friendship with the forest lingers, they are in some way also gifts from his father. When the *amu* befriended David in a dream, he explained what would happen: "I have everything [for you] he said. Four, no six, corrals of chickens. I will open one of them. And then that pig [corral]. I will open the pigs. He said he would open that one. Now you have to kill well, he said. Don't shoot carelessly. Aim well, and tas! Kill them clean. Don't wound them."

The story we have just examined exemplifies what was once the normal process through which a boy came into social relationship with the forest, in ways continuous with his father and grandfather. Although David successfully proceeded through estrangement and sickness to inherit his father's friendship with the forest, the dangerous quality of the forest is real. David had a brother whose life was taken by the water spirit people. Although I have examined a male narrative, girls also entered into social relation with the forest through their mother's and grandmothers' relation to the land in a similar manner.

From this and other similar narratives it is possible to identify certain key assumptions underlying the Kichwa social relation to nature:

1. The forest is a network of plant and animal *amus* who manage their own abundance. As such, it can't be managed by human science as though it were simply an agricultural resource. In contrast, both the environmentalist NGOs and the socialist environmentalism behind government policy understand the forest as a resource to be managed using the best science available.
2. While the forest cannot be managed, it can and should be courted like any intimate friend. For those who live in social relation to nature, part of courting nature is to live with it, to visit it, and to appreciate its gifts. Thus the forest should not be abandoned or left alone. The animals that it gives should be accepted, killed, and eaten. Its fruits and medicines should be harvested. The gardens should be planted. This may be the case, even if population density is high with correspondingly small plots of land and dwindling populations of animals, and fish. These convictions may clash with western forest managers, who conclude that some species should not be hunted and some forest areas should be left untouched.
3. The forest physically alters the body of those who live in social relation to it. Hence a group of extended relatives who live in relation to the same forest partake in a shared body because their bodies are altered by the forest. Thus it is the forest body that creates an intimate affinity between people across generations, and so, holds a community together. This same shared body that binds people together internally also serves as a vale of privacy that excludes foreigners whose bodies are not adapted to it.
4. It is only this local community who can speak for the forest or say what might be harmful to it. What is or is not harmful to the forest is determined by empathy. And this empathy

can only be felt by those bound in heightened physical affinity with the forest. Sometimes it depends on who does the activity and in what spirit. For example, the shout of greeting to the forest, laughing with the forest, or singing to species by people related to the forest, may make the forest glad. While shouting and joking by oblivious strangers may annoy the forest. This contrasts starkly with both with the way in which threats to the environment would be perceived by either AmazonWatch or Alianza Pais. Despite their differences both of these movements would determine environmental harm through scientific testing of water or air and would likely not take social relationship to nature into account.

5. The wealth of the forest belongs to the local community, who live in social relation with it. This is because the gifts of the forest are the fruit of their relation to the land. Like any gift from a lover or from a parent, they are gifts given out of preferential love. One might think of them as a limited family inheritance. This differs strikingly from the NGOs who see the Amazon as “the lung of the world” with a global benefit as well as from the Revolution Ciudadana, which views the Amazon as a national resource.
6. The belief that the forest is a sensitive living being creates a much higher standard for what is likely to harm the forest. For people who hold this view, the environmental crisis is not caused by poor resource management but rather by socially alienating the forest. Any intrusive sound, smell, unsightly structures or too many intrusive strangers, can annoy the forest, causing it to retreat. Although the trees may still be there, the forest becomes empty and barren because the forest owners withdraw their animals and fruits.

For men like David, and their female counterparts, the forest is an intimate place of beauty, memory, and song. Their relation to the forest has been achieved over time through suffering and hard work. The life sustaining gifts they receive from the forest are the fruit of this difficult but precious relationship. Still, because the relationship is delicate, its gifts can never be taken for granted. If the *amus* retreat, the families lose not only their livelihood but also the intimacy of the forest as medium of shared body and memory. Since the foreign workers, noise, and odors that petroleum extraction brings violates the intimacy of the forest and leading to its retreat, the indigenous communities generally oppose petroleum extraction in their areas.

Although I have argued that these are key assumptions underlying indigenous decision-making about the environment, they do not, on their own, determine the outcome of particular decisions. For example we might at least expect the most traditional people who hold these assumptions to resist extraction. Yet when Shell Oil first began exploring the Ecuadorian Amazon in the 1930s and even when Texaco entered in the 1960s and 70s, there were many monolingual communities who apparently did not resist extraction. Instead, they moved or sought work from the companies. Why?

Anthropologist Paul Rivière wrote that “there are two frequently reported features from the (Amazonian) region that appear to be intimately associated.” The first “is the high degree of residential mobility” and the second is “the Native people’s low threshold of tolerance for dissension ...in social relationships which is coupled with an unwillingness openly to voice criticism” (Rivière 2000). In the early stages of extraction, many communities apparently

perceived the forest as a kind of limitless expanse. Although the communities (*ayllus*) tied to local forests did sometimes unite against common enemies, they were also often divided.

Following Rivière's argument, it is likely that they were prone to move their hunting grounds farther into this apparent expanse of forest rather than risking conflict with oil companies. At the same time they sought trade goods, benefits, and temporary employment from the companies.

What accounts for this apparently contradictory behavior? How could traditional people living in social relation to the forest seek trade goods and temporary employment from oil companies they believed offended the forest? There are at least two reasons. Because the forest owners were highly local it was possible for a person to work for a few months for an oil company 20 or 30 miles from the forest where they hunted without affecting their localized relation to the forest at home. The social relation to the forest was pragmatic and emotional rather than moral. Although people had a friendship with their local forest and depended on its good will for food, they did not feel an altruistic moral imperative to defend forest as such. The forest was not something "sacred" in the sense that people felt that they were engaged in a great moral betrayal or sacrilege if they worked for an oil company or traded for a shotgun at some distance from their homes. What they likely felt was a sense of fear that the forest where they worked could cause them harm such as landslides, cave-ins, storms, or sickness, or trees falling on them.

This fear was not entirely new. Across the western Amazon it was believed that local land defended its local friends against neighboring communities who were their enemies. This means that while people felt that their local land was a friend they were also used to the idea that the

land around rival communities fifteen or twenty miles might act in a hostile manner to them if they entered that territory. This was true on a micro level with the manioc gardens of individual women. Each garden was tied in social relation to the woman who planted it and was believed to suck the blood of children or women from other families who might enter it uninvited. The *amus* of the forests where their enemies lived were bound in friendship to these enemies. The forests aided these enemies and were thus counted among these enemies. Although the communities likely believed that extraction would cause the forest owners to retreat, taking the animals with them, they may also have thought they could simply follow the animals farther into the forest rather than fight. In other cases they were minimally compensated for their lands and felt they had little choice but to take the compensation and move on. When they needed temporary work or trade they could travel out to the oil company post without compromising their relation to the forest owners where they had retreated farther into the forest.

It may be for similar reasons that the more remote Achuar, Shiwiar, Sapara, Waorani, and Kichwa communities are divided over extraction at the present time. In more remote areas there are still some who believe there is an expanse of forest out there into which the forest *amus* can retreat. In testimony before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Alicia Cawiya, Vice president of the Waorani, sought to dispute this idea held by some fellow Waorani. She argued that oil drilling in her area had to stop because the noise of large machinery and roads cause the relatively uncontacted Waorani to retreat farther into the forest following the retreating animals. There they are attacked by the uncontacted Tarmenane who have no further forest to retreat into (Cawiya 2015).

B. Social Relation to Nature in an Altered Forest

An important change in the social relation to nature occurred in many Amazonian communities due to the impact of the Ecuadorian land reform of the 1960s and 1970s. It is among these communities that support for government policies of extraction is now strongest. Given the assumptions underlying their social relation to nature, how can these communities support extraction? I would argue that it is not primarily because of changes in belief but because of changes in the land. These communities still speak Kichwa or Shuar. They still carry the beliefs and emotional memory characteristic of the social relation to the forest described above. However, due to pressure on the land in these communities, the forest person is frequently believed to have withdrawn, or to have become hostile and to have hidden the game.

The belief that the forest *amu* has retreated due increased population or deforestation is now widespread in the western Amazon. David Gow provides an example among the Piro living on the lower Urubamba in southern Peru around 1990. When Gow asked a local man if the forest person was still there, he said “Oh, no! Don’t you see, many people now live there. All of those women urinating around that place, [the] Forest Person and all of his animals have long gone.” (Gow 1991, 190). Living in a place where the forest *amu* has withdrawn or hidden the animals is now the new normal. For reasons mostly beyond their control, the ability to live in social relation to the land has been significantly hampered. What has changed is the land itself and their ability to control what happens to it.

As an example of this change, we will examine the Andi and Cerda *ayllus* (extended families) now living between Santu Urku and Syndi on the South bank of the Napo.⁴ During the early 20th century, these *ayllus* were profoundly disrupted by the rubber boom and ensuing epidemics. Although a majority of community members were taken down river to work rubber and did not return, a remnant remained in the headwaters. This group washed gold for Esther Sevilla, a rubber era patron to whom they were indebted, moving seasonally between hunting grounds above the mouth of the Sunu and her Hacienda Venecia near Misahualli. Their old hunting grounds on the South Bank of the Napo across the river from Venecia had been lost to Waorani, who in turn were likely pushed upriver by rubber tappers somewhere around the turn of the 20th century. Around 1960 the Ecuadorian government freed indigenous communities across the country from debt servitude to haciendas. A little later the Ecuadorian Institute of Land Reform (or IERAC) was formed to relocate the now free but landless Andeans to the Amazon.

As a result, the Andi and Cerda *ayllus* were freed from their debts to the Hacienda Venecia but also forced from the north bank lands now claimed by the hacienda. In 1961, two founding shamans led the surviving remnant of this community across the Napo to inhabit the forest that had been their hunting grounds before it was occupied by the Waorani. The newly formed IERAC gave them small allotments of forest in this new area. Soon highland families leaving the haciendas in Guaranda were given allotments behind them to the South as well as upriver to the west and downriver to the east. To maintain their titles IERAC required them to improve their lots by cutting down a percentage of the forest. Across three subsequent generations these original allotments have been subdivided, with the result that young families now typically have

less than one hectare. Although men might still kill an occasional agouti, paca, or armadillo, there is no longer enough land to sustain hunting as a way of life. As a result of these changes, their emotional relationship to the forest has also changed. As with the previous section, an examination of testimonies will give some idea how this social relationship to the forest has changed.

Pedro Andi, a great grandson of one of the shamans who led the Andi and Cerda *ayllus* back across the Napo, described their re-encounter with the land as one of estrangement:

Santu Urku is the name our grandfathers gave to this place. When they would approach that mountain, they would first hear thunder, then it would darken and rain would fall so that it was not possible to arrive at the base of that mountain.

Around the base of that mountain there used to be some game. So that is why he didn't let anyone come near, because he did not want to give them game.

This passage describes the experience of the Andi and Cerda clans as one of being resisted by the land. There is nothing untraditional about the resistance of the land. Usually however, the land only resists people who did not have recognizable ancestral ties. Thus the narrative suggests that because of the loss of life during the epidemics, displacement by the rubber boom, as well as the fact that the land had been occupied by hostile Waorani, the ancestral ties to the land had been lost so that it no longer recognized the descendants of those who had lived there generations before.

To understand this hostile reaction of the land the *yachaks* (medicine men or ritual specialists) drank *ayawaska* in a traditional manner. What they saw was a beautiful and powerful forest owner who resisted the approach of people:

When they drank the vine...they saw a man...dressed in white, like a saint...How powerfully he stood on...that mountain...watching from afar so that when people would come he would just lift his hand and thunder would sound. And...when he would signal with his hand, the rain would fall...and the wind would rise up...scaring the people away.

The beliefs of these people do not appear to have changed. Although nominally influenced by Catholicism, the conclusions they drew were in keeping with the tradition. “There is an *amu* in that place who looks like a saint, a forest *amu*. No one is able to approach because a *supai* (devil) is there.” So they gave it the name Santu Urku. Usually the *yachaks* would have attempted to establish a social relationship to the mountain. Instead, they simply attempt to contain its power. In order to be able to hunt, “the *yachaks* blew [tobacco] towards the mountain so that he would enter inside, inside the house where he lived.”

As in David’s account, this local forest has a powerful *amu*, which controls access to the game animals. What contrasts with David’s experience to the forest is the forest’s relation to the people. Here the forest *amu* keeps them away because he does not want to give them game. This forest is not their friend. Nor is it the friend of their parents. In the Napo headwater area the rubber boom and epidemics had caused such rapid displacement that the generational transmission of friendship to this particular forest was disrupted. Powerful and beautiful, the

forest man of Santu Urku appears to be a syncretic figure as a cross between a devil and saint. The *supai* (devil) side of this forest man is not simply a Christian invention however. It is the way that the forest *amu* appears to traditional people when the social relation was broken. The *yachaks* who viewed Santu Urku in this light likely had positive social relations to other forests in their hunting grounds near the mouth of the Sunu. But these forests where the Waorani had entered had become hostile. Unable to establish family relations, the *yachaks* blew tobacco on the *amu* of Santu Urku to calm him down and to lock him up inside his forested mountains.

A little later another event occurred in the same location that would send shudders up the spines of every mother and child, further changing the community's emotional relation to the land. On a hunting trip to Santu Urku the life of a grade school boy named Bartolo was taken by a Santu Urku *sacha warmi* (forest spirit girl). On his way school Bartolo had to walk two kilometers through virgin forest. As he was walking through this forest, "unexpectedly a girl was standing there on the path with yellow hair like a foreign girl and eyes like a foreign girls eyes. Bartolo stood staring at her in fear and when his eyes tired he blinked and she was gone." After this girl appeared to him, uncanny things began to happen. When Bartolo would go out to fish he would catch too many for a boy his age. More animals fell in his traps than in the traps of adults. His mother was worried that his luck was too good. She suspected the *amu* girl. In the old days this might have led to a productive friendship between Bartolo and the forest, but times had changed. In a previous era Bartolo might have become a friend of the forest by spending his days walking in the forest. But now, instead of hunting with their fathers, boys were supposed to go to school.

One Monday in 1963 or 1964, when Bartolo should have been in school, his father Manuel decided to take him hunting to Santu Urku. When they arrived at the base of the mountain a group of capuchin monkeys began to call. Just as Tomas Dahua had left his son David to follow game, so Manuel left his son at the base of a tree to follow these monkeys. But this time, the results were different. Manuel had only gone fifty yards when he heard his son cry out. When he returned to the spot there was no sign of his son. The community searched for days with no result. Finally the boy's grandfather drank *ayawaska* and saw that, instead of just making him sick, the forest girl had kidnapped him and was holding him prisoner inside Santu Urku mountain. Over the years Bartolo is said to have grown up inside the mountain, to have had three children with this girl, and to have become a leader among the *amus*. In the old days, Inca children were given to mountains to be spouses in order to cause these local mountains to be generous to their human in-laws. But Bartolo never returned to his family. Nor did he benefit them as a forest spirit relative. Instead, he haunted the forests of Santu Urku, at least once attempting to lure one of his cousins inside. This event had a profound impact on the community. Fear was added to school as a barrier to boys developing their relationship to the forest. These episodes illustrate the change in the social relation to the forest that occurred along with the changes in land tenure and the rise of schooling.

In addition to this change in the social relation to the forest, there was also a change in the community's perceived ability to control access to their forest. Although space does not permit me to describe all of the intervening events, it was in this context that a Canadian petroleum company began drilling on the edge of this community in 2012. The oil was owned by the state,

with the Canadian company functioning as a service provider. Thus to oppose the company was to oppose the government as well. Furthermore, the entrance to the site was on private land just outside the community. Even if they were opposed to drilling, most community members felt there was little they could do. In the summer of 2013, an American biology professor was hiking through the forest guided by two Andi Ayllu men when they arrived at a creek downstream from the drilling site. They found it uncharacteristically green in color, full of foam, and giving off an unpleasant odor. They took pictures and informed the president of Tiyu Yaku, the Kichwa community that drew its water downstream from this creek. To get the company's attention, the community cordoned off a private road through their land also used by company tankers to get water.

The next day the company's community relations team showed up at my office. Because I had hired the Kichwa men who initially reported the contamination, they sought my help in getting the private road reopened. They were very professional. They assured me there must have been a mistake. They invited a delegation from the Kichwa community to visit the site of the alleged contamination, followed by a tour of their environmental controls center, and ending with dinner. I accompanied them. By the time our delegation visited the site several days later, however, heavy rains had washed the creek and only a little foam was visible. We walked upstream to their site and donned protective clothing. To my untrained eyes at least their protocols looked impressive. The meal was good. The oil company had the water tested at the prestigious Laboratorio Izquieta Pérez. The oil company also promised to build a potable water system for the community. The community unchained the road. The oil company later reported back that

water contaminant levels were within legal limits. Unfortunately they could not release the results, because the tests were treated as private company property. Plans for the potable water system that the company promised the community were started but never finished. There was little the community could do.

Then, unexpectedly the company pulled out and left on its own. It was announced on the radio that the company could not get to the oil because it was too deep or expensive to extract. Rumors circulated that a Chinese company would soon take over the site. For the community, however, the company's failure to find oil was no accident. The *yachaks* drank *ayawaska* and determined that the company had been drilling into the home of the forest *amu*. In response, the *amu* had repeatedly damaged the drill bits rendering them unable to continue. In addition, he was also angry at the *ayllu* (community) for not prevented the entry of company, and so had withdrawn his game animals leaving them without food. Faced with the inability to keep intruders out, the *amu* not only removed the oil but the animals as well.

This hiding of forest wealth may in fact be the most prevalent explanation of what the forest does in the increasingly prevalent cases where the community lacks the power to physically exclude outsiders. Frequently the *yachaks* work with the *amus* to get them to hide forest wealth. In 1995, I had a chance to observe this first hand. In that year we spent several months living in a small house built in forest on the banks of the Pastaza a few miles from Puyo. Each morning as I was enjoying the river and planning to fish, a *colono* (as settlers transplanted from the Andes are called) would come by and throw dynamite into the river. He would then collect the fish killed

by the blast and sell them. One morning when an influential *yachak* named Samuel Grefa, came by our home, I enlisted his help to solve the problem of the man who fished with dynamite.

Samuel said he would handle the problem, and we left it at that. I thought he might get the community to talk with this man. Two days later Samuel came by again. He told me that he had drunk *ayawaska* to communicate with the *amu* who lived in the river. “She has withdrawn the fish,” he told me. As far as Samuel was concerned, the problem was solved. Even though no one would see fish any more, they were not really gone. They were just locked up for safety in the middle of the river by the water *amu*. He also told us not to swim in the river. The *amu* was dangerously angry from having all that dynamite thrown on her head. As in the previous case, the forest wealth was safely withdrawn. At the same time, however, the community’s social relationship to nature had been damaged. Because the *amu* was now more hostile to possible intrusions she might be dangerous even to people who treated her with respect.

To sum up, when the forest is broken up by land reform and fragmented by roads or deforestation, the *amus* are believed to retreat. If they do not retreat they become hostile, hiding the animals, stealing children, or endangering life. The social relation to nature is broken, not by community members but by changes in the land that are beyond their control. The belief that animals are withdrawn by the *amu*, rather than becoming extinct, may mean that real threats to extinction may not be taken as seriously as they should be. In the case described above, no action was taken against the man who fished with dynamite because people believed that the *amu* would hide the water animals. If a hunter who believes himself to have a social relation to the forest comes across a rare animal, he may think that the animal is not really in danger of

extinction. Rather, he might think that one of these animals, otherwise generally withdrawn from circulation, has been let out as a special gift to him. Since it would be ungrateful to reject the gift, he shoots it. If, on the other hand, the forest *amu* is already gone and the social relation broken, people may feel that the environment cannot be further harmed by environmentally friendly extraction.

As part of a social body, community members often agree to compromises for the sake of peace within their communities. In communities with a reduced land base, people are more depended on government assistance because they cannot easily live off the land. Younger families have received government housing funded by government income from oil revenues. Women with dependent children receive government assistance funded by oil money. Many men are working in government construction projects funded by oil money. The government has made it very clear that failure to support oil extraction may result in the loss of these oil funded benefits. While they may still fear a social break with the forest, many also fear losing these benefits if they fail to support extraction. In addition many are convinced that the government will go ahead with extraction, whether they support it or not. After long meetings, where everyone speaks in turn, people tend to vote together. These days they sometimes vote in favor of extraction.

C. The Rise of the Kawsak Sacha Movement

It is against this background that the Kawsak Sacha movement now dominating the foreign media image of the Ecuadorian Amazon emerged. In particular, it arose from the communities that still had a large land base. In the press, many of the people behind the movement are

portrayed as timeless traditional Indians determined to live off their sacred forest just as they have for centuries. This image is only half right. The communities behind the Kawsak Sacha are indeed the most geographically isolated and the least integrated into the state. At the same time, however, this very fact has given them an iconic international status as some of the most traditional indigenous people left on earth. With the rise of globalization and social media, this iconicity has allowed them to become much more connected internationally to Europe, the US, the UN and the international indigenous movement than are other Ecuadorian Indian communities. The Kawsak Sacha movement is thus a product of this combination of connectivity and rurality. To take this proposal seriously, it is important to understand it not as a backward looking, romantic, or nostalgic movement but as a one situated at the cutting edge of Amazonian modernity offering a plan for the future.

It is perhaps Sarayaku, the community at the heart of the Kawsak Sacha movement, that best represents this combination of rurality and connectivity. Sarayaku is indeed geographically isolated. To get there requires traveling several hours by canoe. Sarayaku has more forest per person than any other Kichwa community in Ecuador. According to Gerardo Gualinga, one of the community leaders, “Sarayaku is a Kichwa community with a territory of 135,000 hectares of virgin forest....We are 1,200 inhabitants” (Gentile 2015). Simple division yields the surprising result that Sarayaku has 112.5 hectares per person including babies! By contrast, if one were to count children and grandchildren most Amazonian Kichwa families have less than one hectare per person. Clearly, the conditions of possibility for maintaining a social relation to the forest

would be different in Sarayaku than they would be for most traditional families now living in areas with less forest.

Despite (or perhaps because of) its rural rainforest expanse, no other Amazonian community is as well connected to NGOs, national politics, or international ecological activism as Sarayaku. For a community of 1,200 people, Sarayaku has produced an impressive number of political luminaries. Patricia Gaulinga, frequent speaker for AmazonWatch, was vice-presidential running mate of Alberto Acosta, Ecuador's most prominent environmentalist, and former president of the constituent assembly that wrote Ecuador's present constitution. Sarayaku-born Monica Chuji served as Secretary of Communication for Correa's first administration (now in opposition). National Assemblyman Carlos Viteri (also from Sarayaku) is president of the National Biodiversity Commission, and served as director of ECORAE, the government's Amazonian development body. Sarayaku's heightened connectivity has also led to personal alliances with Europeans. The most visible younger spokeswoman for Sarayaku is Nina Seren Gualinga. Completely fluent in American English, she is the daughter of a Swedish biologist married to a Sarayaku woman.

Sarayaku has effectively used this heightened connectivity to gain a more effective control over its rainforest territory than is enjoyed by any other community in the Ecuadorian Amazon. During the administration of former president Lucio Gutierrez, the Ecuadorian government conceded drilling rights in Sarayaku territory to Occidental Petroleum without the consent of Sarayaku. When Sarayaku resisted, the government sent military helicopters into Sarayaku in

support of Occidental. Sarayaku took the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In July of 2012, the IHCHR ruled in favor of Sarayaku, setting a precedent for indigenous peoples around the world. The celebrity lawyer who argued Sarayaku's case was none other than José Serrano, now Minister of the Interior orchestrating the Correa Administration's attempt to counter Amazonian resistance to extraction.

The ruling of the IHCHR made Sarayaku a rallying point for indigenous sovereignty and environmental activists around the world, guaranteeing a steady stream of paying visitors to Sarayaku. The visibility that accompanied the court ruling it made it more difficult for the Ecuadorian government to counter Sarayaku resistance to extraction without causing an international outcry. This in turn strengthened the communities resolve. Gerardo Gualinga, chief of security for Sarayaku, now describes their sense of control in the following terms: "We are absolute owners of our territory... We have seven schools, seven communities, and a high school. We identify ourselves as an autonomous government" (Gentile 2015).

It is was with this visibility and this history, that in the Fall of 2013, one year after the IACHR ruling, Patricia Gualinga and others from Sarayaku led the Amazonian women's march on Quito that brought the Kawsak Sacha movement onto the national scene. Following Sarayaku's lead, other communities with a similar geographic profile (but less connectivity) joined Sarayaku's call to keep oil underground. Many in the international community thought that they were rejecting oil in favor of continuing to live off the land. Although the romantic image of timeless Indians plays well outside the country, within Ecuador a proposal to live timelessly off the land

would be quickly dismissed as unrealistic. For the most part indigenous young people want what young people everywhere want: global connectivity, good jobs, and secure health care. If there are no jobs locally they will migrate to the cities rather than attempt to eke out a living off the land. To argue that the Kawsak Sacha Proposal is in fact sustainable it is necessary to examine it as a mature modern movement that offers a viable alternative.

Despite appearances, the Kawsak Sacha proposal does not envision a completely traditional economy as an alternative to an oil economy. Although the exact means are still unclear, what it proposes is sustaining a modern indigenous lifestyle through ecotourism, grants, partnerships, and perhaps carbon sequestration trading with ecologically minded countries in Europe. This shift to a mixed economy of living partly off the forest and partly off tourism required subtle but important changes in the movement's philosophy and style. A paradox endemic to this mixed economy is that the tourists, celebrities, and NGOs who support the community do so in part because they believe them to be a traditional community living off the forest. Yet increasingly the communities can only afford to do this because of the supplemental economic support coming from tourism and NGOs. This requires that community members maintain a heightened traditional image, and to some degree a heightened traditional lifestyle, while at the same time gaining an education, traveling to conferences, writing grants, appealing to foreigners, and hosting a steady stream of visitors in their forest homes.

Among these changes are subtle changes in the way the relationship to the forest is understood.

At least since Max Weber wrote his *Protestantism and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), it has

been widely accepted that religious cultures change together with their economic means of production. This means that like any religion, indigenous religion is not timeless but something that grows and adapts with the times. We would expect then that a social relation to the forest practiced for subsistence living by isolated non-literate people would necessarily differ from a social relation to the forest maintained by more educated people, who make their living through hosting visitors to the forest. One of the results is the emergence of a Kawsak Sacha version of the social relation to the forest, which is more compatible with the view of nature held by environmentalist NGOs. It is to these changes that we now turn.

D. The Kawsak Sacha in Public Spanish Language Discourse

When they speak in Kichwa or Achuar among themselves, the families who oppose extraction no doubt continue to talk about the forest *amus* in language similar to that David Dahua or Pedro Andi. In Spanish language statements for an outside audience, however, the leaders of Sarayaku portray the forest in terms that are changing with the times. For one thing they appear to lay greater stress on the unity of the forest. In a 2013 interview with reporter Carlos Vera, Patricia Gualinga stated, “Our...proposal...is that the living forest should be completely respected. I don’t refer to the forest as living because of its plants or its animals. I refer to the living forest because of its integrity” (“Secretos del Yasuní: Resistencia” 2013). By integrity she means that the forest as a whole is a single living being. The unity of the forest is not something traditional people would reject as false. However, it is also something they did not stress. As we have seen above a given forest could have many spirit people who, although they were certainly believed to

communicate with each other, were no more tightly organized than were the dispersed human communities that made up the Amazonian population.

In addition to stressing the unity of the forest, the Kausak Sacha is now portrayed as unequivocally good. The numerous stories of the forest overwhelming travelers with nausea and headaches, sexually abducting children, or stingily hiding the game are gone, at least from public discourse. In the same interview Patricia Gualinga said, “We have contact with the forest and we know that behind that biodiversity, that mega-biodiversity that exists in the forest, in the rivers, the lakes, and the waterfalls there are protective beings who maintain it in equilibrium.”

In this discourse the forest *amus*, literally “bosses,” are now referred to more benignly as “protective beings.” The function of these protective beings is not just to manage a particular game species but to manage the equilibrium and biodiversity of the forest as a whole.

“Biodiversity,” of course, is a scientific concept that implies a whole body of science-based policy for regulating populations. The incorporation of this language into Kawsak Sacha discourse means that biodiversity itself is now an indigenous value to be defended. The whole web of species, and not just key game species, are valuable because each species, no matter how obscure is intimately connected to the survival of the rest. The second term, “equilibrium,” refers to the balance between species. If even a small unknown species, or a species undesirable to humans is lost, this can cause the whole web of biodiversity to come apart through a chain reaction. For this reason, it is important to preserve the forest in its integrity.

The maintaining of biodiversity is, of course, a matter of global importance. By portraying the *amus* as “protectors of biodiversity,” Gualinga portrays them as benefitting the global community. This contrasts with Kichwa language discourse of men like Pedro Andi or David Dahua, analyzed above, where the forest *amus* took whole networks of animals out of circulation simply because they were angry or because one of their human friends died. When the function of *amus* becomes the protection of biodiversity, then they are no longer just protectors of their local friends. They become global protectors.

When the language of Kawsak Sacha is translated into Spanish, a Christian lexicon is also introduced. The forest becomes *sagrado* and the *amus* become *dioses*. This introduces a religious intensity to the fight for the land. In an interview with the journalist Bill Gentile, Gerardo Gualinga says of the *amus*, “They are people whom we cannot see with our eyes... They are people who are protecting us. They are living spirits. In the large trees, there are thousands of spirits that are alive. They are sacred for us. We cannot destroy them” (Gentile 2015, 7:45). Of the oil companies he says,

They want to destroy this and take the money out fast. But even if you have millions, it will run out. Meanwhile, this forest where we are standing and we will die, will last until the end of time. The *buen vivir* lies in maintaining the forest intact with the animals that we can hunt, its whole library and pharmacy that you see here in the forest. That is what is important for us (Gentile 2015, 9:25).

In addition to developing a new version of traditional language, young Amazonians like those from Sarayaku are also modeling a new way of being friends of the forest. The fear of a destructive forest *amu* appears to have diminished. If paying attention to the forest through daily hunting is impossible, the forest does not need to be feared for that reason. Perhaps part time hunting can be combined with new kinds of attention to the forest, including academic study of tropical ecology, historical or anthropological study of social relations to the same forest species in previous generations or neighboring communities, as well as ecological action on behalf of the forest. All of these might be carried out under the broader umbrella of a social relation to nature.

In this chapter I have attempted to lay out some of the assumptions implicit in the Amazonian social relation to nature. I have also shown how these assumptions can lead to differing decisions on environmental action. The Kawsak Sacha Proposal is an important articulation of the Kichwa social relation to nature for a new era. It is reformulated in dialogue with the biological sciences and international ecological organizations and climate change politics.

The language of Sarayaku leaders like Gerardo and Patricia Gualinga's resonates with traditional Amazonian discourse because it has deep roots there. Sarayaku and the communities allied with them have made a strong case for opposing extraction on Amazonian religious grounds. But in the increasingly polarized environment that now exists in the Ecuadorian Amazon, it is important to realize that theirs is one particular adaptation of Amazonian philosophy. It is also important to understand it as an adaptation of the Kichwa tradition for public discourse in international forms. It is also adapted to the lives of the more cosmopolitan and educated members of the community.

Many within their territories continue to practice a social relation to the forest in ways more similar to that articulated by the Montalvo and Venecia narrators analyzed in the preceding pages.

A primary purpose of this chapter has been to examine the larger context of the Kichwa social relation to the forest of which the Kawsak Sacha Proposal coming out of Sarayaku is only one contemporary articulation. Their particular formulation is closely tied to Sarayaku's economic model, which depends on territorial sovereignty. Although Sarayaku has so far been successful, the Ecuadorian government appears determined that the IACHR ruling on Sarayaku not be extended as a precedent to other communities. To ensure this they are working to foster groups within each community who understand or support the government position and who can assent to extraction from within the community. Hence, future support for the Kawsak Sacha Proposal may depend on whether individuals feel that the relative autonomy of Sarayaku is a realistic possibility for their own communities. For some it may be. Others equally grounded in the social relation to nature may favor different strategies. This does not mean that they have abandoned or betrayed the social relation to nature, but rather that they are pursuing it under differing conditions of possibility.

¹ Although the evidence I examine here is from Amazonian Kichwa narratives the social relation to nature I describe is shared by several groups in the Ecuadorian Amazon including the Shuar, Achuar, and Sápara.

² Post script: At the time I wrote this chapter I could find no available written document of the Kawsak Sacha Proposal. My understanding of the proposal was gathered from statements by Sarayaku leaders in videos posted on the internet as well as Facebook posts and news articles. Just after I had finished the article a document was published on the Sarayaku website. In a separate online article, anthropologist Eduardo Kohn writes the following about his role in assisting with the writing of the document: “I have collaborated with the community of Sarayaku in the preparation of a proposal for the legal recognition of a new category of protected territory that they call *Kawsak Sacha* or the Living Forest, which they presented at the COP21 Climate Summit in Paris in December 2015 and also, personally, to France’s president, François Hollande. *Kawsak Sacha* is a vision of ecological stewardship based on animist principles (Descola 2013). I see it as a hopeful example of how sylvan thinking goes political in these times of ecological crisis.” Eduardo Kohn, “Ecopolitics.” Theorizing the Contemporary, *Cultural Anthropology* website, 21 January 2016. <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/796-ecopolitics>

³ Over the course of consecutive summers from 2010-2015 I carried out many hours of open-ended interviews on the forest in Kichwa at the Andes and Amazon Field School on the Napo near Tena. In addition to Kichwa people from that community, we also had 2-6 narrators from Montalvo and Canelos on the Río Bonanza in residence at the Field School each summer.

Narrators from Montalvo (a community distant from the road) in residence at the field school provided narratives representative of communities distant from roads while narrators from close to the Tena area represent communities closer to roads. Although these narratives are illustrative the broader argument comes out of years of residential experience in areas near the Amazonian capitals of Puyo and Tena as well as ample experience with people from more remote areas.

Social networks, especially Facebook now provide an additional window into the internal conflicts dividing the various Amazonian communities.

⁴ This is a community that I know well because it is my wife's home community. The people quoted and referred to here are her relatives. I have also held elected office in Santu Urku as "vocal de medio ambiente" (councilman for environment).

Word Count: 11,255