



CHAPTER 2

Controlling Abandoned Oil Installations: Ruination and Ownership in Northern Peruvian Amazonia

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INTRODUCTION

Oil extraction has led to severe environmental degradation in Loreto in Northern Peruvian Amazonia and has created landscapes of scattered debris. It started in 1972 when the Peruvian government granted concessions of oil field IAB/192 to the American Occidental Petroleum Corporation (OXY) and oil field 8-8X to Peru's state-owned Petroperú (La Torre 1998). In spite of changes in the corporations operating these oil fields, destructive environmental practices have characterised oil extraction here for four decades. As early as 1984, the National Bureau for the Assessment of Natural Resources (ONERN) declared oil field IAB/192 one of Peru's most polluted areas (ONERN 1984). Up to 2009, Pluspetrol—which won the bid for Block 8 and acquired rights to oil field IAB/192 in 2000—continued discharging toxic effluents with a high

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C. Vindal Ødegaard, J. J. Rivera Andía (eds.), *Indigenous Life
Projects and Extractivism*, Approaches to Social Inequality and
Difference, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93435-8_2

content of heavy metals and hydrocarbons directly into soil and water bodies (Yusta-García et al. 2016; Lu 2009; Campanario and Doyle 2017).

These practices have left many sites contaminated and unproductive oil installations in ruins. The numbers of such sites and installations, however, are contested. Oil operators have not registered them in environmental management plans which go to the authorities, and the environmental authorities do not have independent registers. Only in oil field 1AB/192, 249 oil wells have been drilled. Of these, 76 have been declared temporarily abandoned, while 40 are permanently abandoned (Lu 2009; Campanario and Doyle 2017).¹ Additionally, there are the ruins of other types of installations that have been dismantled earlier, such as a refinery or a harbour operated by OXY until the mid-1980s, ruins which often have not been counted. In 2013–14, increasing conflict and political mobilisation forced environmental and health authorities to carry out a series of monitoring activities with the participation of villagers and local environmental monitors. Taking the presence of hydrocarbon residues as the defining criterion, the Agency for Environmental Assessment and Control (OEFA) documented the existence of 92 contaminated sites, including some abandoned installations, which had not been declared by Pluspetrol.² However, the indigenous organisations of oil fields 1AB/192 and 8 claimed that there were more than 2000, including dumps of toxic waste (Campanario and Doyle 2017).³

On the one hand, this chapter is concerned with the sheer materiality of the leftovers of extraction in the Upper Tigre River. On the other hand, it addresses the diverse and changing ways in which the Kichwa people in the Upper Tigre River have related to this debris in their daily lives.⁴ My aim is twofold: I acknowledge and build upon the insights of literature on environmental justice that critically examine the unequal distribution of harm—which invariably hits marginalised populations the hardest (Bohme 2014; Kuletz 1998). However, I explore the Kichwa people's claims of ownership of different types of oil debris, and suggest that they also express other ways of conceiving and enacting ownership, and, thereby, of the relation established between subjects and objects. I argue that these understandings and world-making practices, which could be called 'ontological', are central to how the Kichwa relate to oil production and its leftovers. These are infrequently discussed in literature dealing with environmental justice and extraction (Arellano Yanguas 2011; Bebbington and Bury 2013). My second aim, as Krøjer's chapter in this book does, is to question and take a step beyond the critique of the ontological turn in anthropology, which tends

to assume that an interest in ontological questions is, almost per definition, essentialist (Cepek 2016; Vigh and Sausdal 2014). While I show how the Peruvian state's enactments of dominant models of property do make worlds as Blomley (2013) aptly puts it, I contend that the Kichwa people of the Upper Tigre River contest the state and corporate colonial dismissal of their indigenous ways of life and of existing asymmetries, precisely by enacting different forms of ownership, including state-promoted forms. In my analysis, I bring two distinct theoretical frameworks into dialogue and tension. By focusing on waste, rubble, and ruination, the first framework critically reviews the persistent effects of imperial and colonial formations that continue constituting some places as sacrifice zones (zones that are spatially destroyed and environmentally impaired) and some people as disposable (Stoler 2013). The second framework focuses on indigenous understandings and practices regarding ownership, that is, on different and divergent ways of establishing rights over things and persons (Brightman's chapter in this book, Brightman 2010; Brightman et al. 2016; Santos-Granero 2009b).

The chapter begins with a brief presentation of the two analytical frameworks. The second section is an account of the different processes of placemaking and of military spatial reorganisation and relocation that preceded oil production. In the third section, I discuss how people sought to appropriate oil debris to counteract corporate stinginess and exclusionary practices. The concluding sections explore how different understandings and enactments of ownership are put into play to contest ruination and exclusion.⁵

RUINATION AND OWNERSHIP

Ruins, rubble, and ruination are central concepts in the works of Gordillo (2014) and Stoler (2008). A ruin, they suggest, is in itself an ambiguous concept. As commonly used, 'ruins' evokes a sense of large-scale structures abandoned and grown over, of the decay of what once was grandiose, to give space to something new. However, 'ruins' also refers to 'the material sedimentation of destruction' (Gordillo 2014: 10) and to 'what people are left with' (Stoler 2008: 194). In my analysis, I use waste, in addition to rubble and ruination, to approach the leftovers of oil production. These leftovers are heterogeneous; they include toxic waste—which leaked into or was disposed of in water bodies or which accumulated on outdoor dumps—and the corroding infrastructure left behind when oil

findings were no longer considered profitable or when oil installations were dismantled. The ways in which people of the Upper Tigre River relate to the different types of oil debris are ambiguous in several ways. For them, oil debris materialises the destruction of previous places and the colonial disregard of their existence and their ways of life. At the same time, oil waste and rubble are the material expression of thwarted promises of progress.

The accumulation of toxic waste, rubble, and ruination are part of political projects that render certain people as disposable and certain places as sacrifice zones. Yet waste, rubble, and ruination can be turned into sites of contestation, of alternative interpretations, and practices that animate new possibilities (Stoler 2008). As we shall see, they may also be transformed in such a way that they challenge exclusion, state abandonment, and state control. In this chapter, I argue that the emergence of such possibilities is linked, in Peruvian Amazonia as elsewhere in Latin America, to claims of territorial control and ownership. This is not surprising. The spatial reorganisation which colonisation brings about has been at the core of colonial regimes. The denial of different forms of ownership, especially of land, has been a premise for establishing the idea of property as private and exclusive (Brightman et al. 2016). Hence, territorial control, ownership, and property have been central issues to indigenous struggles since colonial times (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990, 2010).

As I show, the people of the Upper Tigre River are claiming ownership over abandoned installations, such as oil wells or the corroding grids of oil pipelines of what was once a refinery. I argue that their claims rest on divergent but coexisting understandings and enactments of ownership which are common in native Amazonian⁶ contexts, and which also are part of and a response to colonialism and capitalist expansion. In my analysis, I build on recent anthropological work from Amazonia, which explores how ownership is conceived and enacted in contexts in which a divide between persons and things is, at its best, fuzzy, and cannot be assumed.

It has been extensively documented that indigenous peoples in this region endow objects with various degrees of agency, subjectivity, and as having their own life (Viveiros de Castro 2004; Guzmán-Gallegos 2009; Santos-Granero 2009a; Walker 2012; Berjón and Cadenas 2018). Objects are also thought of as personified objectifications of social relations, that is, objects appear not just as things but as the materialisation of the relational constitution of persons. For instance, natural objects such as swidens materialise the relation between spouses and constitute them as such;

manioc plants materialise the knowledge and bodily abilities of the female owners of the plants that enable the women to plant, maintain, and nurture a rich garden. Plants materialise also the relations, which a woman considers herself to be part and product of. Moreover, the relational constitution of persons entails the co-constitution of persons and objects. Manioc plants, which are particularly important in the process of becoming a proper woman, are carnally associated with the women who create them. If a woman dies, her plants will also die, as nobody will take care of her garden (Descola 1994; Guzmán-Gallegos 1997; Coelho do Souza 2016).

While current hegemonic Western assumptions constitute and perform property as individual and permanent (Blomley 2005, 2013), ownership in native Amazonia is conceived of and enacted as a process of appropriation. Continuous acts of care, of renewal, and of creative transformation are central, and those who nurture and care have rights in, and control over, what is nurtured and cared for (Brightman et al. 2016; Fausto 2012; Guzmán-Gallegos 2015; Santos-Granero 2009b; Walker 2012). Ownership is further subject to abandoning and forgetting. When the owner no longer takes care of it, cannot transform it into something else, or when something once owned is abandoned and forgotten, ownership may cease. This is the case, for example, with forests which have been transformed into swiddens and which are owned by those who cultivate and take care of them. Swiddens that are abandoned may turn into forests and may be forgotten; the traces of those who once owned the swidden disappear gradually, together with the rights they once had. Abandoned places may be subject to new processes of appropriation (Brightman 2010; Guzmán-Gallegos 2015; Brightman et al. 2016; Viegas 2016).

Dominant legal regimes constitute property of land as a fixed enclosure and a natural object that can be alienated. However, native Amazonians conceive of land, including forests and water bodies, as worlds that humans inhabit together with other nonhuman beings. Indeed, according to a common perception, reality is made of different worlds. As Fausto (2012) aptly suggests, these are worlds of owners. For the villagers of the Upper Tigre River, for instance, the rivers are the world of the water people (*yakuruna*) and the forests the world of the forest people (*sacharuna*). The swirling rivers are places inhabited by the black boa, the owner and mother of fish. In the forests, a man is the owner of the forest animals. It is up to the mother and owner of fish and the owner of forest animals, respectively, to let the villagers navigate the rivers and walk in the forests safely. As caregivers of fish and game, the owners can decide when the villagers may catch

fish and obtain game. These perceptions and practices are not valid in national legal frameworks nor from the perspective of state representatives. But neither do the people of the Upper Tigre River make them explicitly relevant in their claims and demands of the state. However, along with many other people in Amazonia, they are engaged in struggles for retaining ownership and control of the places they inhabit. They do so by enacting property on both the terms of the state and according to their own practices.

The formalisation of ownership often raises practical and epistemological questions. As Brightman et al. (2016) suggest, even when native conceptions and practices are taken into account, much may be lost in the process of translation. I contend, however, that the formalisation of ownership of land, of forests—and as discussed here, of oil infrastructure—multiplies the object owned. It does so in such a way that the owned object also materialises and personifies the relations the people of the Upper Tigre River have with the state and with other non-indigenous actors such as oil companies and merchants. I suggest that this multiplicity hinges on common Amazonian perceptions, according to which no thing is only one but rather is ‘both and’. This means that what an entity is (human or nonhuman) depends on the relations from which it emerges (Viveiros de Castro 2010: 40; de la Cadena 2015). Second, this multiplicity requires that other ways of conceiving and enacting ownership are neither annulled nor replaced. The ownership of such objects entails not only care but also legal titling. This multiplicity is, I suggest, part of people’s response to the colonial dismissal of their ways of life.

PLACEMAKING AND COLONIAL RELOCATIONS

The Upper Tigre River crosses oil field 1AB/192, located at the borderlands of Ecuador and Peru, in Northern Peruvian Amazonia. The inhabitants of this area trace their origins to Kichwa villages located northward in the Ecuadorian Amazonia and to Achuar and Quechua villages located eastward in the Peruvian Amazonia. They also include in their origins the Spanish-speaking mestizo traders who came from other Amazonian towns, married, and settled in the area. These extensive kinship, intermarriage, and trade networks were abruptly transformed in 1941 when the war between Ecuador and Peru broke out and the frontier line was moved 300 kilometres north; new forms of spatial occupation were introduced, and asymmetrical patronage relations were reinforced.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, the Peruvian military, often combining physical violence and existing patronage bonds, relocated Kichwa villages and families who lived dispersed along tributaries of the Tigre River. This strategy, designed to gain military control over these areas and their indigenous inhabitants who were considered *ecuachos* (people from Ecuador), meant that the interfluvial occupation of space common in those days, was largely replaced by a riverine occupation which also facilitated a stronger inclusion of Kichwa settlements into the debt patronage system. The military then appointed Spanish-speaking mestizo *patrones*, usually traders, as authorities of the new villages; they gained control over indigenous labour and their products through permanent indebtedness. The *patrones* provided Kichwa families with desired goods, such as soap, clothes, shotguns, and cartridges, in advance, which the Kichwa paid for by selling hardwood and pelts. The villagers consider these asymmetrical exchanges as acts that demonstrated the *patrones*' caring intentions and as acts of exploitation. According to Don Osvaldo, a man in his 70s who told me the history of his family and his village, 'Some patrons were better than the others and liked to share, and cared for their people. However, when we sold things to them, the hand of the patron was his weighing scale, no wonder that we could never get rid of our debts.'

A new form of spatial occupation, based on the negation of existing forms of territorial control and placemaking, started when oil extraction activities began in the early 1970s, simultaneously expanding existing frontiers of extraction. The military and the exploratory companies contracted by OXY displaced families from their houses and cultivated areas, arguing that the riverbanks, swiddens, and forests were unoccupied land belonging to the state. This destruction of orchards and forests to clear the sites for oil installations entailed the colonial dismissal of local ways of life and, according to the villagers, the oblivion of those who were the owners of those places. Magdalena, a woman whose family was displaced, said to me: 'We were living there but they said that those places were uninhabited. They made us run away from our own houses, and we got nothing for all our work and suffering in making swiddens, nothing was left.' In other words, the work and effort which the families had put into building houses, into transforming forests into swiddens, and into the daily and arduous caring of swiddens was ignored, and the traces of their lives were destroyed.

Oil installations became points of attraction and hope—and of exclusion. Wanting to take part in the promises of wealth and development,

Kichwa people relocated their villages to be closer to productive oil installations. They benefitted partially and indirectly from oil extraction through the expansion of existing trade, which reached new peaks with the increased presence of mestizo merchants and loggers, and through the migration of male mestizo workers employed by the exploratory and oil-producing companies. During exploratory activities, Kichwa men worked as *trocheros* clearing paths so the workers of exploratory companies could lay seismic lines and as *mitayeros* providing game for them. When oil production started, oil operators did not hire indigenous people. So the Kichwa men continued working as providers of game and significantly increased their logging of valued hardwood such as cedar and mahogany. As in earlier times, however, merchants associated with oil transportation took the biggest share. Villagers and missionaries can still recall the unprecedented amounts of hardwood that were shipped away in the same boats that transported crude oil.

The disregard and negation of the existence of indigenous families; the destruction of swiddens, houses, and forests; and the increasing trade that followed oil production led to severe degradation of forests and to the near extinction of some animal species such as ocelots and turtles. This absence of valued trees and animal species came together with the continuous presence of debris caused by oil production practices.

CORPORATE STINGINESS AND EXCLUSION: GATHERING AND APPROPRIATING OIL DEBRIS

Exclusion, corporate stinginess, and ways of contesting it have been recurrent themes in the conversations and memories of the people of the Upper Tigre River, as illustrated in the account of Arturo from the village of Marsella. The village was founded in the 1950s after a forced relocation of families who had been living dispersed along the Piedra Lisa River. When exploratory oil activities started in the 1970s, Marsella was again relocated to the opposite side of the river where OXY was to build a refinery. Once it was built, OXY had a camp within the refinery of cement houses with electricity and access to clean water for the American engineers and the Peruvian Spanish-speaking workers. OXY's American engineers, said Arturo, were stingy and did not want to share. According to Arturo, they were so stingy that they preferred to throw away the food they did not eat and the things they no longer used rather than give these to the villagers.

Apart from the merchants, who could afford kerosene and gasoline, the native people of Marsella were left without electricity but with the leftovers of extraction. As this section shows, appropriating the debris produced by oil extraction practices became a way for the villagers to counteract corporate stinginess and exclusion.

Continuous oil spills, leakages, and toxic waste characterised oil production in oil fields IAB/192 and 8/8X. Residues of crude oil were found in soils and water bodies. Crude oil leaked from different sources: from vessels transporting it to harbours in Saramurillo and Iquitos, from oil pipelines, from oil wells, from open mud pits, and from small streams in which oil debris accumulated. Hundreds of old containers of toxic thinners piled up and corroded outdoors. In oil field IAB/192, toxic effluents with a high content of barium, chloride, hydrocarbons, and oil grease were frequently discharged directly into soils, rivers, and streams, without any treatment (Lu 2009).

Although the villagers of the Upper Tigre River were aware that oil spills and leakages affected aquatic and animal life, they also considered oil spills as a way to appropriate some of the wealth that oil workers enjoyed. When crude oil leaked from transporting vessels because they had collided—either with each other or with tree trunks dragged by the river—women, youngsters, and children waded into the greasy waters to gather the oil. With their bare hands, they filled small bottles with oil, which they used for making small burners to get light in the evenings. Old containers, regardless of the toxicity of their contents, were also desired objects that people sought to own. In their view, these were part of the wealth that the OXY engineers did not want to share. Parents sent their children to see if they could get some discarded containers from the Peruvian camp workers, who often gave them away in exchange for game or plantains—or, if there were no workers, the children simply took them. As the villagers explained to me on different occasions, they made something new from the disregarded containers. Indeed, they were used as stoves to cook food, as bathtubs for small children, as trays to make manioc beer or manioc powder, or to store water. Acts of transformation and appropriation of the abandoned containers could, however, have dangerous consequences. On several occasions, women who split old containers of toxic thinners became seriously sick or died. A high school director, who often helped these women, argued that people could not read the warnings written in English on the containers, which detailed how dangerous its contents were, and recommended destroying the containers immediately after use.

These understandings of oil debris both as materialisation of corporate wealth and stinginess, and as something that could be reworked and thereby appropriated, came to coexist with other notions and practices related to oil debris. As the result of political mobilisation and the approval of new laws and regulations, oil debris gradually became the materialisation of the state's and corporations' careless production of rubble and ruination. For the people of the Upper Tigre River, it has become vital to try to gain control over this rubble as a way to stop ruination, as the cases of Vista Alegre and Marsella show.

HINDERING THE KILLING OF A WELL⁷: THE NEGATION OF CORPORATE RUINATION

Vista Alegre is located at the edges of oil field 1AB/192. It is one of the villages that participated in the strikes of 2015 when the villagers of the Upper Tigre Rive blocked the passage of all vessels, including those bringing food to the oil workers who were staying in current oil-producing installations located further north. The strikes were part of the ongoing social mobilisation that demanded state and corporate recognition of severe oil contamination in oil field 1AB/192 and to oblige the state to take action (Guzmán-Gallegos 2017a). In 2016, in Vista Alegre, three environmental monitors and I decided to visit the old leaking oil well that had been central to their demands. When we arrived, I was surprised by the mixed debris on the site and the explanation I was given. The corroded and leaking oil well, located in the middle of an *aguajal*,⁸ was enclosed by a newly built wooden platform. On another platform was a brand new cement mixer and a pump surrounded by the ruins of what had been a temporary camp, with the remains of walls and roofs, heaps of canned food and beverages, and piles of fairly new industrial metal tanks.

Miguel told me that this oil well, located within Vista Alegre's communal lands, was drilled in the late 1970s and was closed defectively in the 1980s. Oil and production water had always leaked from this well into the stream running nearby. However, Pluspetrol did not know of the existence of this oil well, or, Miguel believed, most probably, the company did not want to acknowledge its existence. Therefore, the villagers were the only ones who could show the environmental authorities where the well was and help them to document the condition of the surroundings. Miguel explained that for many years, this had been an overgrown area that the villagers of

Vista Alegre cleared each year when they came to the site to celebrate Carnival. Miguel stressed that the periodical clearings testified that the people of Vista Alegre had never forgotten the existence of the well.

More than three decades later, in 2014, the Peruvian authorities declared this oil well a contaminated site to be remediated and instructed Pluspetrol to compensate the people living close to the well. Pluspetrol cleared this site and installed the cement mixer and pump to seal the well and clean up the area, while starting compensation negotiations with the villagers of Vista Alegre. Based on an estimate of the destroyed *aguaje* palms (*Mauritia flexuosa*), they offered the villagers USD 3600 to be divided among all the families of Vista Alegre and of Remanentes, a neighbouring village. People considered this amount outrageous and referred to the high death toll that had affected Vista Alegre in the early 1990s when more than 50 adults and children had died. At the time, some villagers believed that so much death was related to continuous oil spills, thinners, and effluents discharged into a lake where they used to fish (Guzmán-Gallegos 2017b). They wanted the health authorities to investigate, but the authorities never came to the Upper Tigre River. Moreover, the engineers employed to seal the well told the villagers that once they had poured cement into the well, it would be impossible to pump oil again. As Venancio, one of the village's environmental monitors, vehemently explained to me, Pluspetrol was planning to kill the well. Taking into account that the well was in Vista Alegre's lands, and that the operator was not willing to take responsibility for the deaths of their children, the villagers of Vista Alegre decided to stop all sealing operations. They preferred to have control of the leaking well and keep it as it was. Ownership and the future of the abandoned oil well became an issue of fierce contention.

The demands of Vista Alegre's villagers were built upon notions of care and ownership common in Amazonian Kichwa areas (Guzmán-Gallegos 2015). Whenever the villagers spoke about the corroded oil well, they pointed out how they had taken care of it each year, how they visited the site, cleared it, and knew where the oil well was. It was true, as Pluspetrol alleged, that it was not a cultivated area—but, they said, nothing would grow there anyway. They could not hunt since game was scarce; owing to the lack of fruit, the monkeys no longer came. As a consequence of their actions of clearing, and not forgetting, the villagers of Vista Alegre claimed ownership of the oil well while excluding the people of Remanentes as owners. After the people who were currently living in Remanentes separated from Vista Alegre and formed a new village, they had not participated in any clearing, the villagers of Vista Alegre alleged. Further, they

interpreted the compensation amount Pluspetrol offered as a manifestation of corporate stinginess and state disregard of their suffering. They insisted that the old oil well was only one of a wider infrastructure of abandoned oil wells, which had ruined several of the water bodies they depended upon. They also brought to the fore the unacknowledged deaths of their children in the 1990s.

The villagers' claims were, in addition, based on understandings and enactments of property framed by Peru's Native Communities Law. The Vista Alegre villagers asserted that the corroded well was their exclusive property because it was located within their titled community lands. Moreover, the well was one of the many abandoned oil installations that had to be accounted for by Pluspetrol's environmental managing instruments. Given their experiences of displacement and state and corporate negation of their existence and their territorial occupation, the villagers considered the current Native Communities Law to be vitally important. This law acknowledges the existence of indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazonia and grants them ownership and territorial rights to at least some of the lands and forests they inhabit and use. The Law of Native Communities and the Promotion of Agriculture in the Rainforest and Edge of Rainforest Regions No. 20653—passed in 1974 and replaced in 1978 by the Native Communities Law No. 21175—was not known in the villages of the Upper Tigre River until the early 1990s.⁹ The villagers recalled how a delegate of AIDSESP (Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest) had visited all the villages of the Upper Tigre River between 1989 and 1990 and had informed them about this law. He said that if people recognised themselves as natives, they could demand that the state recognise the areas they occupy as native community lands. Most of the villagers of the Upper Tigre River then organised assemblies and decided to recognise themselves as native communities. Since 1991 and up to 2010, the villagers of the Upper Tigre River have demanded state recognition of their villages as native communities and the titling of their lands (Guzmán-Gallegos 2017b).

For the people of the Upper Tigre River, this titling means that the state and the oil corporations can no longer negate their existence and behave as if these lands are uninhabited. It also implies that the corporations cannot destroy forests, soils, and rivers, with the same impunity as before. As the villagers said, the state and the corporations have to acknowledge that these lands have owners. As such, the authorities are now forced to relate to their demands and cannot easily disregard their

suffering. The titling of lands entails more than state and corporate recognition. From the point of view of the inhabitants of the Upper Tigre River, ownership entails exclusive rights to what one has taken care of and transformed *and* to what the state has titled. Thus, owned land becomes not only the object that materialises their acts of care and transformative work. Through land titling, land becomes also an object that materialises their acts towards the state and the corporations, as well as their relations with them. The enactment of land as property constitutes the villagers as natives, that is, as a group of people recognised by the state and as collective proprietors of the lands they inhabit. As those who have taken care of the well and as native proprietors of titled land, the villagers of Vista Alegre claimed that the abandoned oil well was theirs.

While the titling of lands reinforce their understandings and claims of ownership over the oil well, the instruments of environmental regulation for the oil and gas sector serve to reframe their relation to oil debris and to corporate stinginess. Since the early 1990s, mining and oil companies are required to develop and present a PAMA—(Environmental Compliance and Management Plan) a plan to clean up, prevent, and reduce pollution so that corporate production practices comply with environmental standards. The requirements of such plans are a direct response to the extracting industries' pervading environmental degrading extraction practices and poor environmental management in the country. However, since most of the extractive corporations have been unable to comply with their plans, the Ministry of Mining and Energy approved a new norm in 2003 (Supreme Decree 028–2003) authorising the corporations to present PACs (Complementary Environmental Plans) with modifications and deadline extensions. OXY presented its PAMA in 1994, which had to be completed in 2004. When OXY transferred its concession rights to Pluspetrol in 2000, it also transferred to Pluspetrol its PAMA obligations. However, Pluspetrol never complied with the PAMA and presented a PAC in 2004 (Lu 2009: 50–52).

As mentioned in the introduction, official documentation confirmed that there were severely environmentally damaged sites that were not taken into account by OXY's or Pluspetrol's PAMAs nor by Pluspetrol's PAC, and that the remediation measures taken were either inadequate or poorly done. From the villagers' point of view, not acknowledging the existence of these sites and not implementing adequate remediation actions not only confirmed the corporations' stinginess but also showed the corporations' will to destroy the sites and then evade responsibility for

the damage done. For the people of the Upper Tigre River, not allowing Pluspetrol to seal the well ‘to kill it’ and also asserting ownership of the abandoned well were ways of gaining control over past damages and the possible future wealth the well might generate. They related such damages not only to the compensation amounts but also to what they perceived as the corporations’ denial and disregard of the truncated social and biological reproduction of their people in the past. As Stoler (2013) and Gordillo (2014) suggest, ruination entails the destruction of previous places and the colonial disregard of the colonised lives. Thus, affirming ruination and taking control of abandoned oil installations, both the ruins and the remaining toxic waste, are acts of contestation *and* of negation. By not allowing Pluspetrol to seal the well, the villagers’ actions were, I suggest, a negation of the corporations’ exclusionary practices. They were also a rejection of the negation of their lives.

The acts of contestation of corporate and state negation implied in taking control over oil debris are, as the next section discusses, not just acts of affirming environmental ruination but also of affirming control, to use Gordillos’ words (2014: 58). This presupposes the redefinition of ownership and, with it, of the relations with non-indigenous actors and between the villagers themselves.

TOXIC WASTE, PIPELINES, AND THE REDEFINITION OF OWNERSHIP

Oil extraction in the Upper Tigre River has destroyed places by saturating them with oil debris. This was also the case in the area where OXY’s refinery was located, near the village of Marsella. On this site, in stark contrast to the forests and swiddens that surround Marsella, bare mounds with low guava trees could be seen. Although Pluspetrol’s representatives claimed that the corporation had already cleaned up the site, the clean-up was so badly done that OEFA included the refinery at Marsella as one of the 92 contaminated sites that Pluspetrol had to remediate before it left the oil field in 2015. According to Carlos, a villager of Marsella, Pluspetrol was never interested in remediating this area; rather, the company preferred to hide all the remains of past production activities. To do so, Pluspetrol employed local men to gather the crude oil rests that had accumulated in an adjacent stream. With no proper protective clothes, the villagers collected oil rests in plastic bags. A huge, deep hole was dug and the bags

were thrown into it, together with the detritus of buildings and even the rest of an oil boat. They covered the hole with soil transported by trucks, but oil kept coming up whenever the temperature rose. The barrenness of the terrain where the refinery once stood, and the scattered oil residues that insistently leaked revealing debris hidden in the underground, contrasted with the very visible grid of corroded tubes and pipelines which ran through forests several kilometres and, in some places, crossed under the waters of the Upper Tigre River. These pipelines linked the refinery to the oil wells located further north at Shiwiyaku and further south at San Juan de Bartra.

While people resented Pluspetrol's poor remediation and the conditions under which they had worked, they, nonetheless, claimed ownership of the leaking toxic waste. To the villagers, the appropriation of toxic waste meant that they, as the affected population, had the right to be temporarily employed to clean up the lands that they had once owned. Through paid work, they could renew the ruined streams and soils and, in spite of being dangerously exposed, get access to the wealth that oil was supposed to create. The appropriation of the leftovers of previous oil extraction was, I suggest, a way for them to partially reverse the process of ruination materialised in the hidden debris and the bare landscape. It was an act of affirmation of control.

Such acts of affirmation entail the redefinition, and thereby the multiplication of forms of ownership, and, with them, the co-constitution of the villagers and of the objects they own, as illustrated by the claims of ownership over abandoned pipelines. The villagers of Marsella considered that the corroded pipelines had been OXY's property, since OXY had installed and used them.¹⁰ From the time OXY dismantled the refinery in the late 1980s,¹¹ however, as the villagers noted, neither OXY nor the state had taken care of the tubes, as their corrosion and decay showed. Years later, mestizo traders from Iquitos started cutting the tubes in order to sell them in other Amazonian cities. The people of Marsella, considering these acts as a form of unfair appropriation, decided to hinder the traders. The villagers claimed that the tubes were theirs since they crossed the lands from which families from Marsella had been displaced when oil extraction started and affected the forests and streams the villagers still used. People argued in conversations and communal meetings that the pipelines could not be separated from what most families in Marsella had suffered. Initially, some men from Marsella started cutting the tubes and selling them to traders. Since these sales benefitted only their own families, the villagers

decided, in a general assembly, that the native community was to act as the collective owner of the corroding pipelines. Later, they made an agreement with a mestizo trader who had his own crew to cut and take out the tubes, for which the village as a collective received an amount of money that was divided and given to all couples with children. In this way, they had some money to buy school supplies and medicines if needed. Additionally, the trader provided them with goods at lower prices than those offered by other traders.

By affirming control of the transformation of abandoned pipes into pieces of tubes to be sold, the villagers wanted, as with the toxic waste, to invert the loss they had suffered by making the pipelines productive for them. The transformation of the ruined pipelines into productive objects presupposed, however, the redefinition of the pipelines as collective property and the villagers as collective owners. By becoming collective proprietors of the abandoned pipelines, they sought to contest and transform several asymmetrical relations. The villagers decided to inhibit further internal differentiation and accumulation that oil activities have produced, and they sought to change the terms of the exchange with non-indigenous merchants. Contrary to what is usually the case in the oil field AB/192, they were able to negotiate better prices for the tubes they were selling, securing at the same time access to other desired goods, without becoming enmeshed in debts, which were difficult to repay, as is still the case with other traders. By transforming themselves into collective proprietors—and ruined pipelines into objects they owned since they were related to their suffering and were part of the lands they once owned—they sought to transform both ongoing ruination and long-standing colonial asymmetries.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the toxic waste and abandoned installations of oil field 1AB/192 and the ways in which the villagers of the Upper Tigre River relate to the oil debris scattered on their lands. The chapter discussed the environmental degradation that oil extraction has left in terms of ruination, waste, and rubble and explored the contesting actions of villagers by showing how these actions relate to divergent notions and enactments of ownership, which are widespread in Native Amazonian contexts.

My aim has been, on the one hand, to look critically at the destructive effects of capitalist proliferation, and to question a strong tendency to redefine capitalist destruction, as Gordillo points out, as something innovative,

even desirable: ‘the unavoidable [and thereby acceptable] side effect of an ever-thriving system’ (Gordillo 2014: 80). On the other hand, I have explored and highlighted the Kichwa people’s persistent and insistent affirmation of the existence of other ways of life and other understandings. In the case discussed here, the focus has been on the insistence of other understandings and enactments of ownership and thereby of the relation between subject and object. The insistence of these other ways is part of both the inclusion of the Kichwa people of the Upper Tigre River in capitalist and colonialist ruination processes produced by oil production in this area and their counteractions against such processes. Further, this insistence hinges, I suggest, on what Viveiros de Castro (2010: 40) calls a ‘political multiplicity’. Such multiplicity entails a shared understanding that nothing is *only*; entities are *both and*. The inhabitants of the Upper Tigre River consider themselves as both the descendants of the marriages of Kichwa, Achuar and mestizos, and as native proprietors. Owned land is both the result of acts of care and transformation and a legal titled object, which materialises their relation with the state. The same applies to their claims on toxic waste and abandoned installations. The insistence on the existence, resilience but also the inclusion of other ways (of being and of ownership) hinges on the insistence on multiplicity, of being not *only* but rather *both and*. Insisting on multiplicity questions the colonial denial of other epistememes, of other ways of being, and, thereby, the supremacy of the notion of a One World as defined by neocolonial state formations and reinforced by capitalist proliferation (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010; Escobar 2015).

NOTES

1. According to Orta-Martínez (2010), 400 oil-producing wells have been drilled and of these over 200 have been abandoned.
2. During 2013 and 2014, the National Environmental Health Agency (DIGESA), the National Water Authority (ANA), the Agency for Environmental Assessment and Control (OEFA), and the Regulatory Body for Energy Investment and Mining (OSINERGMIN) conducted environmental monitoring in oil field 1AB/192 and oil field 8. As part of these activities, they registered the existence of contaminated sites and abandoned oil installations whose existence Pluspetrol negated.
3. The organisations were the Federation of Native Communities of the Corrientes River (FECONACO), the Quechua Federation of the Pastaza River (FEDIQUEP), the Federation of Native Communities of the Tigre

- River (FECONAT), and the Kukama Association of the Marañón River (ACODECOSPAT).
4. Depending on the context, the Kichwa of the Upper Tigre River identify themselves as Kichwa or, simply, as villagers. In this chapter, I use both. The Kichwa of the Upper Tigre River speak a Kichwa dialect different from the Quechua spoken along the Pastaza River and the Kichwa spoken along the Napo River.
 5. This chapter is based on six months of fieldwork carried out in 2015 and 2016 in four communities of the Upper Tigre River. It also draws on many visits and participation in activities related to local environmental monitoring while I was working in the area from 2007 to 2013.
 6. Viveiros de Castro suggests that in Amazonian cosmologies what an entity *is* depends on the entities' point of view; for instance, what jaguars see as beer, humans see as blood. The differences in their perspective result from their bodies. de la Cadena explores Viveiros de Castro's suggestion that a thing is 'both and' to discuss different understandings and enactments of land and territory.
 7. To kill the well means to render it unproductive, to take from it its vitality, its capacity to grow, or make other things/persons grow.
 8. An *aguajal* is a wetland area where *aguaje* palms (*Mauritica flexuosa*) grow.
 9. The reformist military government of General Velasco passed the Native Community Law 20653 in 1974. Four years later, in 1978, the conservative military government of Morales Bermudez replaced it with the Native Community Law 21175 to facilitate large land and forest concessions to private actors.
 10. A letter the state-owned PeruPetro sent to me as a response to my questions regarding the Marsella refinery states that oil infrastructure is theirs.
 11. The then president of Peru, Alan García, demanded that OXY close down the refinery of Marsella. The reason of his demand is unclear. Representatives of the state-owned PeruPetro explained that it was part of García's nationalising project. Local authorities and the villagers assert that it was a measure to end gasoline smuggling.

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