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**Transnational Activism: The Case of Sarayaku. The
Actions of Sarayaku in the International and National
Arenas**

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RESUMEN

El activismo transnacional ha conocido una gran expansión en la última década. Aunque este tipo de militancia ha generado diferentes causas, conoció un crecimiento en el área del medio ambiente. Hoy en día, uno de los desafíos más grandes es sin duda la preservación de la naturaleza. De hecho, el activismo transnacional es hoy día utilizado por los pueblos indígenas para defender la naturaleza frente a la amenaza de la explotación petrolera, entre otras cosas. Ésta pone en peligro no sólo el futuro de la Amazonía, sino también los territorios de los pueblos indígenas, ya que muchos están ubicados en la selva. Este trabajo de investigación toma el caso del pueblo Kichwa de Sarayaku, una comunidad indígena de Ecuador, para ilustrar cómo algunos pueblos indígenas están actuando a nivel nacional e internacional para defender su causa.

Palabras Clave: *activismo transnacional, pueblo Kichwa de Sarayaku, pueblos indígenas, acciones nacionales, acciones internacionales, Ecuador*

ABSTRACT

Transnational activism has greatly expanded in the last decade. This kind of militancy, involving networks of people and alliances across borders, has increased worldwide. Different kinds of causes have generated this activism, which has grown in the area of environment. Nowadays, one of the biggest challenges is certainly the preservation of nature. In fact, many Indigenous people in the Amazon are facing oil exploitation threats. This puts both the rainforest and indigenous people's territory in danger. In response, some of these people have chosen to react through transnational activism. Considering this situation, this investigative work takes the case of the Kichwa people of Sarayaku, an indigenous community of Ecuador, to illustrate how some Indigenous people are acting nationally and internationally to defend their cause, and to determine if the people of Sarayaku mobilizations involve transnational activism.

Key Words: *transnational activism, Kichwa people of Sarayaku, Indigenous people, national actions, international actions, Ecuador*

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I. Introduction

Patricia Gualinga, Sarayaku's International Relations representative, stated: "As a people, I can see that we have managed to lead a fight. I think that we still need to reach the victory, which is that our territories could remain united forever from oil exploitation. Indigenous people of Ecuador are suffering and are still fighting. Sarayaku is just an example of what is happening." This was during the presentation of Dr. Mario Melo's book about Sarayaku's trial against Ecuador in March 2017.

Nowadays, transnational activism has expanded so much that it can be considered as the kind of militancy the most frequently used in the world. One of today's biggest challenges is perhaps the struggle for the environment, mainly characterized by the desire to preserve it from globalization, oil exploitation, and other similar threats due to its importance for societies. The forests are the lungs of the planet earth, and without them the ecosystems would crash. To prevent that, some Indigenous movements have emerged. Actually, "in the last decades and especially in the 90s, indigenous movements came out and have multiplied in different countries of Latin America" (Paz Herrera 2015, 64). Nowadays, many indigenous people are fighting to defend their territories that are being threatened.

However, the struggle for indigenous people's territory and nature still remains unknown by many people. The case of the Kichwa people of Sarayaku is one example of this global fight, and it will be the object of this investigative work. The overall objective is to figure out whether Sarayaku's international and national actions constitute a form of transnational activism. The purpose of this qualitative analysis, based on both document analysis and interviews, is to provide more information about transnational activism by linking it with indigenous struggles and about indigenous

people's fights for nature and their territory. Hence, this essay will try to provide a sense of awareness by explaining what transnational activism is, then describing the people of Sarayaku and its national and international actions, and finally, analyzing whether Sarayaku's mobilizations involve transnational activism.

II. Transnational Activism

The second chapter of the investigative work is about transnational activism. This section will try to promote a sense of awareness about what transnational activism is and what it involves by first defining the concept and then explaining its current use. In that way, this part of the work will give the first information that will allow us to fulfill the overall objective of the paper.

1. Definition

Today's world economic facts and political or social decisions are engendering more global challenges that are contested through activism. It is also a topic that has a fruitful literature. Many specialists have provided various definitions. Della Porta and Tarrow (2005), two social movement experts, defined "transnational collective action" as "the coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions" (Della Porta and Tarrow, 7, qtd in Caouette 2005, 1). Since transnational activism is the kind of protest most used worldwide nowadays, it is important to define its main characteristics.

Transnational activism is a sort of militancy. This happens when some people act for a cause by protesting on the streets and participating to conferences, among other factors. In fact, "In its bare form, transnational activism has been defined as social movements and other civil society organizations and individuals operating across state

borders” (Caouette 2005, 1). This means that it happens under the shape of people grouping and acting for causes across borders.

Networks are an essential element for transnational activism, as it mainly occurs in the form of interactions that are structured in networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 1). This activism includes protests and a whole structure of resistance that transcends borders. Analyzing transnational activism requires the observation of facts and an analysis of speeches made by the people acting, the governments, the actors involved, and eventually of international conferences with people fighting for the cause. The resulting policies established by states would be another important aspect to analyze to know whether (or not) the activism got an impact. In that way, it can be related to the methodological approach of constructivism, as it requires an analysis of speeches and of the social area in which it acts with structured network of interactions. In addition, “Transnational networks multiply the voices that are heard in international and domestic policies” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, x). Therefore, it not only serves as a way to be noticed internationally; it also works as a way to be heard at international and domestic levels.

Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) are two important authors who have written about transnational activism by using other terms, calling it “transnational advocacy networks” in international and regional politics. They cited “Scholars have been slow to recognize either the rationality or the significance of activist networks. Motivated by values rather than by material concerns or professional norms, they fall outside our accustomed categories” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 89). It is true that scholars are used to focusing on narrow theories and limited literature, and tend to ignore

activism networks. These authors' works try to deliver a theoretical approach of transnational advocacy networks for scholars¹.

However, besides the very theoretical side of transnational activism, as Caouette (2005) states, it is hard to get "an informed understanding of this modality of activism in relation to the broad range of initiatives and endeavours for social change" (2). Actually, it can be challenging to determine the priorities: what kind of activity or topic should be treated first? Nevertheless, people's priorities change as fast as society changes. Globalization brings a wide range of new topics that engender protests, such as the threat to environment, for example.

As there are many specialists who wrote about transnational activism, it would be very complicated to name them all.² What is important to remember is that transnational activism is a kind of militancy involving protests, campaigns, and other forms of activism that includes networks and acts across borders. This kind of activism is nowadays very common, concerning many subjects. This will be developed below.

2. Today's use of transnational activism worldwide

Although transnational activism involves a huge range of causes, it is important to focus on one to get a deep and detailed analysis. The major point to underline is that transnational activism happens everywhere, from small regions to big cities in every country. Therefore, all the struggles known nowadays, such as women's rights and equality and worker solidarity, among others, are forms of transnational activism. All these fights show that people do stand up to claim their rights.

¹ Sikkink and Keck have not written anything since then; however, their works have had such an impact that they are regularly cited in the literature.

² See Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999; Schmitz 2001, Stachusky 2013.

However, one of today's most important forms of transnational activism is the indigenous people's fight for environment, what means nature and territory. The Amazon is the habitat of hundreds different types of animals, plants and species, and of many indigenous communities. The protection of the Amazon from multinationals, oil exploitation, and deforestation has been the object of an international awareness, and more people are joining the fight.

The case of Rondônia in Brazil is an example of transnational activism for the Amazon. Planaforo was a project to extract Rondônia's natural resources. To fight against the project, a network was established there and international environmental and human rights NGOs got involved in the struggle (Rodrigues 2003, 50). In fact, "In Brazil, the democratization process and increased interest in environmental issues generated political and financial opportunities for the emergence of environmental NGOs and research institutes" (Rodrigues 2003, 50). The transnational activism struggling for Rondônia involved a network and other actors from abroad. This is just one example of thousands that represent transnational activism for the environment.

In conclusion, transnational activism is present everywhere. The examples mentioned above illustrate this fact. Nevertheless, the most important to study now is clearly transnational activism for environment, as awareness for nature's rights is growing worldwide, due to the threats that the environment faces, that make that all the indigenous communities and living species are threatened to death.

Two elements can be highlighted in this section. First, transnational activism is a kind of militancy characterized by many elements including networks, protests, acts that transcend borders, and so on. Second, this activism is frequently used worldwide, and one of the most important fights is certainly the struggle for environment, as forests are the key for the equilibrium of the ecosystems. The indigenous movements struggling to

save the environment are a good example. The case of the Kichwa people of Sarayaku will be explained below.

III. The Kichwa Indigenous Community of Sarayaku

Chapter III will talk about the Kichwa Indigenous Community of Sarayaku. The objective is to review of the existent literature about this community. In that way, it will provide more information about the main actors of the present study by first covering the historical and spatial context of the community, second its socio-cultural framework, and finally its political framework.

1. Historical and spatial context

The Kichwa people of Sarayaku are an indigenous community living in the Amazonian part of Ecuador. They have been fighting to defend nature from oil exploitation and other causes, which makes them one of the most famous indigenous groups internationally known. This investigative work will first define the main elements to know about Sarayaku, such as: who the Kichwa people of Sarayaku are, their spatial context, and their historical context.

First of all, Sarayaku is located in the Ecuadorean Amazon in the Pastaza province next to the Bobonaza River, and has a huge territory. The whole area is composed of 135 000 acres. Some zones are shared with other communities for hunting and recollecting, and other areas are only accessible to shamans and spirits (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 27). Another fact about Sarayaku is that the community is the association of five Kichwa communities. The population represents over 1200 people³,

³Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

which is relatively small. Nevertheless, other members live in Puyo, the nearest little town from the community, in other Ecuadorean cities, and even abroad.

Second, Sarayaku's historical context finds its origin hundreds of years ago. Its region was related to other societies between the Amazon and the Andes: the "Gaes, Inmundas, Guallingas, and Santes" (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 17). As the whole region, the Amazon was also subject to colonization, marked by the arrival to the territory of the first Spanish missionaries in 1634 and, later, of the Dominicans. The Kichwa people of Sarayaku come from the "Canelos-Kichwa", an emerging culture of this period involving indigenous from the north of Bobonaza, indigenous from the "Sierra" part of Ecuador, the Quijos, the Zaparoano, and Jivaroano (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 20). Their origin, then, is very diverse.

Considering the above elements, it is clear that "Sarayaku is a concrete example of ethnicity that, settled in its own identification like 'Dudzillakta' or '*Pueblo del Cenit*', establishes differences and relations with the national culture and with other indigenous people" (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 7). Hence, they are a good example of indigenous people living in the forest that have developed a special socio-cultural framework for some clear reasons. First, Sarayaku is the union of five Kichwa groups of people. Second, as they were marked by colonization, they have incorporated some elements of the national (Ecuadorean) culture and of the Kichwa indigenous values, establishing differences between them. Finally, they have a special cosmovision. The socio-cultural framework will be analyzed below.

2. Socio-cultural framework of the community

The socio-cultural framework of Sarayaku is mainly characterized by its life system, economic activities and cosmovision. Actually, "Sarayaku's culture is a form to see the world that is continuously built according to its inhabitants' relation with other

actors” (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 30). The community has a special relation with the rainforest that they considered as life, “Kawsak Sacha” o “Selva Viviente”. This relation is based on respect and protection of the nature (“Allpamama”), and all the elements of its socio-cultural framework are based on this “unification” with the environment, making everything to be interdependent. Following, the three elements will be described.

First, Sarayaku’s system of life is based on the repartition of the Amazonian forest. “Sarayaku llacta” is the name of the territory chosen by the members of the community, and the whole sector is organized according to established logistics that are interrelated. Sarayaku has developed a “Plan of Life” that defines the zones of the territory, based on both cultural and ecological aspects (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 32-36). Therefore, the community coordinates its activities on the base of this plan of life.

The territory is then divided into many parts, all having a specific objective. One area is reserved for hunting depending on the places in which sacred animals live, others are where the community lives, and other specific zones are considered as spiritual. As the territory has got about 135 000 acres, some spaces are shared with other indigenous communities such as the Shuar. However, it is difficult to establish the precise limit of the borders due to the immensity of the Amazonian forest. The populated area is divided into five centers that form the whole community, which are Sarayaku Centro, Cali-Cali, Chontayacu, Shiwacocha, and Sarayaquillo.⁴ The families of the community are distributed in these areas depending on their kinship and history.

Second, Sarayaku’s economic activities are diverse and based on the respect towards nature. The most important economic activities are hunting, fishing, cultivating,

⁴ It is important to state that these five centers are not considered as independent, but seen as the components of the community.

but every one according to what is naturally produced and what the rainforest offers. In fact, “Most of the time, the activities are oriented to produce food, mainly for self-consumption, with a few products destined to the sale or exchange” (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 36). They are more directed towards self-consumption to avoid damaging the environment. Some products are sold however to receive monetary resources. The second economic activity, apart from agriculture, is tourism. Sarayaku has implemented a tourism program with its own airline “Aero Sarayaku” in order, once again, to obtain resources.⁵

Finally, Sarayaku’s cosmovision is based on the belief that everything in life is interrelated. All the human beings, animals and plants on earth form a whole.⁶ There are also different worlds: the “caipacha”, which is the land in which human beings live; the “japhuapacha”, which is the sky where the Astros live; and the “ucupacha” that is the underground (Chávez, Lara and Moreno 2010, 44). The three host plants, animals, and people. There are other worlds to reach only by acquiring certain knowledge difficult to get, and that only some members of the community know how to obtain. The belief that all human beings, plants and animals live together in all the existing worlds characterizes this cosmovision. Everything has a role and everything is interdependent. This is why there is such a respect towards nature.

To conclude, the whole socio-cultural system is related to a deep connection with nature in its global sense that includes a different way to see the world. Every piece of the globe has its role and must be respected, and Sarayaku promotes this vision basing its way of living on these beliefs. These elements, despite being summarized, make Sarayaku’s system of life to be so particular.

⁵The economic resources that Sarayaku targets are destined to their international actions (flights, and so on) to defend the environment and their territory. This part will be explained later in this work.

⁶ Patricia Gualinga, March 2017.

3. Political framework

Even if Sarayaku's way of living is special, the community has a strong political framework marked by a clear structure. First, the main organism of decisions is the Assembly, called "Sarayaku runa tantanakui". Then, there is the "Tayjasaruta", which is the Council of the government. The Ecuadorean government recognized this institution (including the assembly) since 1979, when the Minister of Social Well-Being approved it through the ministerial agreement number 0206.⁷ In fact, "Its legal personality was reformed in 2004 by the Council of Development of the Nationalities and People of Ecuador (CODENPE)".⁸ The Tayjasaruta is composed, on the first hand, of the leaders of the Association: a president⁹ or "Tayak Apu", a vice-president "Yanapak Apu"¹⁰, a secretary, a treasurer, and so on; and on the second hand, the Association is also represented by "the Kuraka and Likuati (Ancient Authorities), the Yachack and the representatives of other internal organizations" ("Runa Kawsayta Purichik Kurakakuna") (Chávez, Lara and Moreno, 2010, 67). Therefore, Sarayaku has got a very well structured political framework composed of established members, all having a different role to play.

To close, the historical and spatial context together with the socio-cultural and political frameworks constitute the elements that distinguish Sarayaku from other indigenous people. Since the community counts on a very good economic and political organization, Sarayaku has the capacity to act nationally and internationally. This point will be developed further below.

⁷The information about the Tayjasaruta was obtained through the official website of Sarayaku <http://sarayaku.org/tayjasaruta/institucionalidad-de-tayjasaruta/>

⁸ <http://www.Sarayaku.org>

⁹ The ongoing president is Felix Santi.

¹⁰ All the Kichwa names were also obtained from the website <http://www.Sarayaku.org>

IV. Sarayaku's National and International Actions

The community's national and international actions are an important part of the work that is mainly based on interviews. The objective of this section is to review the results of the interviews to know the international and national actions of Sarayaku. Having the information, it will lead us to the overall objective. Below, the national actions will be described, followed by the international actions, then Sarayaku's alliances, and finally its relation with the Ecuadorean and other governments.

1. National Actions

To defend nature and its territory, the Kichwa people of Sarayaku have realized actions at the national level. Nevertheless, its resonance within the Ecuadorean borders has been slowed down by a context of racism towards the minorities that is still strongly present in Ecuador, and that represses the indigenous people of the country.¹¹ As a consequence, Sarayaku's actions at a national level had less impact than the ones at an international level. Although, still fighting this reality, the people keep struggling to be heard in the Ecuadorean territory through a strategy based on a social network, like Facebook and the official web page of Sarayaku, the local media, and through participating in important legal organizations of Ecuador.¹² Following, the main national actions of the struggle for the defense of nature and the territory will be explained.

In the first place, Sarayaku has promoted a better operation of its community. It has acted by reinforcing its institutional organization, its territory and the exercise of its

¹¹ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

¹² Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

government.¹³ This reinforcement is considered fundamental because it implies several internal changes necessary for the development of the community. First, there was an institutional development of the norms that regulate all the social aspects of the community.¹⁴ The community did it on its own through its Assembly. The purpose of the norms was to obtain a better social order and more legal credibility outside the community. Secondly, Sarayaku developed norms of coexistence for the Sumak Kawsay, the “Good Living”¹⁵ (Buen Vivir in Spanish), which is the harmony with nature. This was necessary because, as it is mentioned before, Sarayaku has a special relationship with it. José Gualinga, former president of Sarayaku, stated, “Making the territory stronger was done through the reinforcement of the organization and the management of the territory, by zoning the areas for the generation of fauna species, hunting zones, and fishing zones”.¹⁶ Finally, the exercise of government of Sarayaku strengthened through some organizations that have been created inside the territory and “manifestations against the actions of the government concerning the amplification of the petroleum borders”.¹⁷ These manifestations were not just realized by being on the ground, but also through all the local levels of communication.

In the second place, Sarayaku has also had a strong presence inside some legal national organizations. Delegates from the community have been really active in the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorean Amazon

¹³ José Gualinga, March 2017.

¹⁴ José Gualinga, March 2017.

¹⁵ The *Good Living*, or *Sumak Kawsay* in Kichwa, is a way of living in harmony with the nature and is the result of several manifestations y change propositions in Latin America, especially the indigenous people from Ecuador and Bolivia (Acosta, 2012, 19).

<http://site.ebrary.com.ezbiblio.usfq.edu.ec/lib/bibusfqsp/detail.action?docID=10832220>

¹⁶ José Gualinga, March 2017.

¹⁷ José Gualinga, March 2017.

(CONFENIAE¹⁸), participating to calls when mobilizations, assemblies and congresses of the Confederation take place¹⁹. Franco Viteri, a member of Sarayaku, was president of the CONFENIAE during several years. The Sarayaku are also members of the Confederation of Indigenous nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). The former president of this Confederation is Marlon Santi Gualinga, member of the community and Kuraka (leader in Kichwa) of the Cali-Cali center.²⁰ Sarayaku always participated in the mobilizations of the CONAIE, such as in congresses, assemblies, press conferences, etc.

A third way of acting nationally is through communication “from the work with other nationalities and communities of the Amazon for reinforcing the unity between them and to defend the Ecuadorian Amazon in general”.²¹ Sarayaku puts much emphasis in having contacts with other indigenous communities of Ecuador. This unification is realized especially with the neighboring communities of the territory as with the nationalities Shuar, Ashuar, Sapara and others, especially to stand against the threat of oil exploitation. The work and the contact with these communities show a real desire of unification and of grouping for a common assertion.

Sarayaku has also done plenty of small activities at the local level. Representatives carried out conferences and small projects. For instance, in 2010, some members went to the French Alliance in Quito to explain their fight, the case of Sarayaku concerning human rights and other topics.²² Sarayaku has tried several times to have its own radio program. However, it has not been accomplished yet.

¹⁸ The Confederation defines itself as “one regional indigenous organization that represents almost 1.500 communities, belonging to the Amazonian nationalities”. CONFENIAE. <http://www.confeniae.net>. (Accessed March 20, 2017).

¹⁹ Tania Monville, March 2017.

²⁰ El Comercio <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/politica/sarayaku-defiende-historia-de-resistencia.html>. (Accessed March 20, 2017).

²¹ Tania Monville, March 2017.

²² Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

In conclusion, the national actions of Sarayaku have been expressed in two ways: first by participating in organizations such as the CONFENIAE and the CONAIE and second by reinforcing its domestic organization, exercising local governance and unifying with other Indigenous people around the territory to fight for the same cause. Even though the local actions cannot often get heard, Sarayaku keeps fighting and making more actions to manage to have an impact.

2. International Actions

Sarayaku is perhaps the most internationalized Indigenous community of the Ecuadorean Amazon in terms of acting internationally to defend its cause. The defense of its territory and nature has achieved a level of communication and diffusion so huge that this fight has awakened the conscience of several peoples in different countries. The community has acted internationally at different levels, mainly communication, participation to international events, and planning projects. As a strategy, Sarayaku has developed the idea of taking and stimulating a project of international relations to spread news about its actual situation, the processes and programs the community is developing (José Gualinga, March 2017). Following, the international actions will be introduced in three different levels of action: communication, acts of presence at the international level, and two of the main projects.

The first level is made by communication and diffusion. Internationally, in the department of communication, Sarayaku has used a lot of social networks, so everything that can be diffused through the Internet. It has a Facebook page and an official website, and a team of youngsters manages both of them. This team is also in

charge of keeping up to date and sending new information.²³ Moreover, the community has a team that realized videos and movies. Some movies have had an international impact, such as “El Canto de la Flor” from Jacques Dochamps and José Gualinga. This film narrates the struggle of Sarayaku, its cultural life, etc. According to Sabine Bouchat, they always get to spread the videos internationally through organizations, web sites, and so on.²⁴ They always try to reach the most possible sectors: children, women, intellectuals, scientists, and so on.

Two principal groups characterize the second level: on the one hand the travels, talks, acts of presence and projects with local organizations of other countries; and on the other side the conferences and international meetings. First, Sarayaku is always invited to give speeches, to go to forums, or to present its projects in small associations, universities, etc. For example, in October 2015, a delegation of 5 women went to give a conference-debate at the University of Liège, in Belgium, about the challenges of the conflict between President Rafael Correa and the Indigenous movements.²⁵ Sarayaku has also participated to many meetings; for example in the encounter with the Mothers of France²⁶, where the Mayor of Paris received the representatives. Also, the community’s representatives have helped small ONG’s such as “La Casa Nicaragua” in Belgium, with which they made a “tour of women”, a project meant to empower women and talk about the impact of the way of living in West over communities like this.²⁷ These women also met parliamentarians from the European Union related to human rights.

²³ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

²⁴ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

²⁵ Rencontre débat Sarayaku,

<http://www.facphl.ulg.ac.be/upload/docs/application/pdf/2015-10/rencontre-debat-sarayaku.pdf>. (accessed 22 March, 2017).

²⁶ The “World Movement of Mothers” it’s an ONG that “favors the role of the mothers in the construction of peace and social cohesion” (mmmfrance.org).

²⁷ Tania Monville, March 2017.

Secondly, Sarayaku has participated to several international encounters and conferences. In September 2016, Sarayaku participated, together with 10 Indigenous communities of the world, to the World Congress of Nature in Hawaii. In this Congress, Sarayaku presented on its way of thinking and cosmovision, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) made a recommendation to the governments to start adopting these ideas.²⁸ In this conference, indigenous people from North America, Hawaii, Mongolia, Siberia, and Africa were also present. Additionally, in October and November 2016, when the problem with the “Dakota Pipeline” started in the United States, Sarayaku was the first Indigenous foreign community to express solidarity.²⁹ From that point, Sarayaku has been following the process of Standing Rock. Patricia Gualinga, together with three other people, went to Dakota in March 2017 once more to show solidarity and to participate to the manifestations. Moreover, currently, Félix Santi, has been invited to an international conference about “Living Well”, in Munich in June 2017. The action stays at the level of appearing in conferences to try to get international support.

Finally, a significant point of the international presence of Sarayaku is the participation in the Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris, in December 2015.³⁰ For this event, the community sent a delegation of 12 people. During the Conference, they could intervene in the official meeting.³¹ The delegation also brought to Paris the canoe *Kindy Challwa* as a symbol and as a direct message representing the idea of the Kawsak Sacha (“Living Forest”) and the existence of the people of Sarayaku³². Now, the canoe is in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. Additionally, they participated to the

²⁸ Patricia Gualinga, March 2017.

²⁹ Patricia Gualinga, March 2017.

³⁰ José Gualinga, March 2017.

³¹ Tania Monville, March 2017.

³² José Gualinga, March 2017.

COP22 in Marrakesh, along with other representatives of indigenous people (Waorani, Kichwa) of Latin America, to present their struggle and expose an intervention panel showing their projects and future plans.

The third level of international actions is going to be explained based on two projects that have reached an international level: the “Frontier of Life” (Frontera de Vida) and the “Living Forest” (Selva Viviente). Those have been chosen because they are two of Sarayaku’s most important projects that were presented in various International Conferences and Congresses such as the World Congress of Nature in Hawaii, the COP21, and the COP22.

The “Frontier of Life” is a project that was created about 15 years ago. It is a long process and one of the most important strategies to protect Sarayaku’s territory. This plan also helps to gather more people who could contribute to help preserving territory. It is about creating a path of flowering trees around the territory of Sarayaku and around the strategic posts of vigilance and control. In fact, “It is when the community understood that it needed a higher force than the one they have to protect what they have from which this idea of life frontier”.³³ Sarayaku itself needed more strength facing the threat of petroleum extraction, and this is why the inhabitants decided to create this project.

At a symbolic level it is beautiful, this symbol of the flower as a protection of the territory... The flower in all its delicacy but that also has a strong sentimental value that is based on the song of the flower, which is a song of the Yachak of Sarayaku and that gives back the strength when you are tired, when you have emotional problems, when you have no more energy... It is a song that gives back this strength, this vitality to keep living.³⁴

³³ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

³⁴ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

The symbol of the flower was well conceived to remind us of Sarayaku's relation with nature. The idea is that in 20 years, the boundaries of the territory and the strategic spaces could be seen and be tracked by these flowering trees from a plane.

The Frontier of Life has expanded so much that it has global amplitude. A whole international political strategy resides besides these strategic places and symbols, in the sense of finding allies for when the territory could be attacked. The project involves organizations and people that can be considered as godfathers of the trees in different countries, which are also considered responsible for the protection of the territory through the trees that have been planted. These godfathers are donors³⁵ located in France, Germany, and Belgium, where the organization "Frontier of Life in Belgium" is working.³⁶ Nevertheless, after receiving, in 2013, the compensation of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights³⁷ of 1.300.000\$, the financial help of the "godfathers" in Germany has strongly reduced. Facing this change of position of the people who supported or could support the project, Sarayaku decided to make a much bigger project, the "Living Forest".

The Living Forest or *Kawsak Sacha* is, according to José Gualinga, "a proposition that the community Kichwa of Sarayaku takes as a juridical, anthropological, and philosophical fight for its territory to be declared and recognized as territory of Living Forest".³⁸ In other words, it would be a legal declaration that would protect the area of Sarayaku's territory. The objective is "to make the people understand the importance of the equilibrium that we are breaking more and more".³⁹ Sometimes, having a legal supportive document helps to raise people's awareness. According to

³⁵ Each person can give 5€, 10€ or another value.

³⁶ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

³⁷The case will be explained in the point 4 of this chapter.

³⁸ José Gualinga, March 2017.

³⁹ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

Patricia Gualinga, as a Living Forest, the people of Sarayaku feel the need to get the recognition of the living space of Sarayaku as a sacred territory, patrimony of biological diversity in Ecuador. This proposal asks for indigenous territories and living forests to be protected from any type of exploitation.⁴⁰ This project includes the Frontier of Life and every other aspect concerning the protection of Sarayaku's territory.

Kawsak Sacha is a plan of three years that has been presented nationally and internationally. The community of Sarayaku already approved the project. It has been presented to the National Assembly of Ecuador but has yet to be considered. It had more impact in the COP21 and the COP22.⁴¹ Sarayaku's hope is that the declaration would be accepted in the Amazon and by actors linked to development worldwide, to change the way that vision of development is conceptualized. According to Sabine Bouchat, "It is also a rematch of the autochthonous communities of the planet for having been destroyed in South America".⁴² Actually, indigenous people have been oppressed for many years for economic reasons. Indigenous territories are exploited to obtain oil and to generate more resources. It is important to start acting to preserve the equilibrium of the world. The general objective of the proposal of Living Forest will take years, but Sarayaku considers important to keep fighting for it.⁴³ The results will be advantageous for the community.

In conclusion, Sarayaku's international actions have been more numerous and more listened than at the domestic level. Its power of communication and diffusion, joined with the participation to conferences, international forums and the help of local organizations of several countries, make Sarayaku the most international indigenous

⁴⁰ Patricia Gualinga, March 2017.

⁴¹ Sabine Bouchat, March 2017.

⁴² Sabine Bouchat, March 2017.

⁴³ Sabine Bouchat, March 2017.

community of the Ecuadorean Amazon. Every action, such as the Frontier of Life or the simple fact of sharing videos, is a step forward in the international fight of Sarayaku.

3. Alliances

The Kichwa people of Sarayaku have always been opened to contact. For example, in the 60s, some groups came to collect rubber, and many oil companies tried to buy their land. Moreover, the community has always had contacts with other indigenous people of the region and has always been opened to all different kinds of foreign groups coming for different reasons. Also, the community has kept distance and has always tried to extract the most interesting of these connections for the benefit of the community.⁴⁴ Today, with some efforts, Sarayaku's contacts have duplicated and the community has got many allies from different groups, both at the domestic and international levels. Some of them are environmental associations, human rights and women rights organizations... The method of contact will first be explained, followed by a description of Sarayaku's allies at the national level, and then the international ones.

Two major events characterize the establishment of the network. The first one is when José Gualinga, Sarayaku's former president, went to Belgium 30 years ago. As it was said above, Sarayaku has always been open to new contacts, maintaining its culture and always being strong in its representation. The first steps of today's Sarayaku's international network started to grow about 30 years ago, when José Gualinga and his wife Sabine Bouchat⁴⁵, decided to go to live in Belgium, where they stayed 4 years.⁴⁶ The couple took advantage of being abroad to start establishing alliances and contacts at

⁴⁴Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

⁴⁵ Sabine is currently member of the technical department of the community.

⁴⁶Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

the international level.⁴⁷ It started with NGOs, Belgian politicians, the European Parliament, and others, and in 3 years a whole network of allies was built in Europe.

The second event is when the Internet was installed in the community about 10 years ago. This allowed the Kichwa people of Sarayaku to create its Facebook page, its website, to start communicating with other people and organizations, and to be always aware of what was happening outside of the territory⁴⁸. Internet has been one of the most useful tools to transmit their ideas.

Sarayaku's national alliances are mainly other indigenous people of Ecuador and Ecuadorean legal institutions. The contacts are made with all the communities resisting to oil exploitation, such as the Shuar people and the Ashuar people. At the institutional level, Sarayaku has developed some important contacts with the CONFENIAE⁴⁹ and with the CONAIE.⁵⁰ Moreover, lawyers of the Inter-American System (CEJIL) have supported and defended Sarayaku during the 10-years trial against the Ecuadorean government. Finally, Sarayaku has also maintained contact with some national NGOs, such as Pachamama alliance.

The international alliances are divided in different kinds of groups distributed in many countries. First, Sarayaku has established a strong link with NGOs of all kinds. Actually, many international projects are made through NGOs that also provides new contacts to the community. For instance, Amazon Watch, a North-American environmental organization defending Amazonian people, put the community in touch with the Dakota people through Internet. As a consequence, a delegation of Sarayaku recently went to the United States to stand in solidarity with the indigenous people of

⁴⁷Tania Monville, March 2017.

⁴⁸Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

⁴⁹ At it was explained above, the CONFENIAE former president is Franco Santi, a member of Sarayaku.

⁵⁰ Its former president is Marlon Santi Gualinga, also member of Sarayaku and current Kuraka of the Cali-Cali zone.

Dakota. Most of the time, Sarayaku is in touch with other autochthonous people through NGOs.⁵¹ Moreover, the community is also in relation with other organizations such as “Development and Peace” a Catholic Canadian organization; “Words of Nature”, in France; “Frontière de Vie Belgique” in Belgium; others are in Italy and Germany. Sarayaku has also recently managed to communicate with the Vatican about their cause.⁵² The Vatican would be a powerful ally as it has access to many media.

On the other hand, Sarayaku has also got many allies in Latin America. It is part of the indigenous coordination of the Amazon basin COICA⁵³, which groups Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and Ecuador. Moreover, it is allied with Colombian organizations to make a stand against oil exploitation, and with Indigenous Amazonian organizations in Peru such as the IDESEP. The community is also in relation with the Kayapos Raoni, a relationship and alliances based on support and solidarity.⁵⁴ Contacts are not only made through other actors; many are established when a delegation of the community participates to public manifestations, international conferences, and important global events or congresses.

Finally, the people of Sarayaku have connections with a huge number of universities, peoples, and schools of the world. These connections are made through the international projects such as “Frontera de Vida”, which involves people in Belgium, France, and Germany; or through conferences that Sarayaku gives in some universities, when the opportunity comes.⁵⁵ Every action and person matters, and this is why its members always try to keep a relation with everyone.

⁵¹Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

⁵²Patricia Gualinga, March 2017.

⁵³José Gualinga, March 2017.

⁵⁴José Gualinga, March 2017.

⁵⁵ Travelling does not happen often due to a lack of economic resources.

To conclude, Sarayaku has a huge network of international and national relations. Even if the international aspect is bigger than the national one, the contacts with the indigenous communities of Ecuador are still important. Sarayaku is member of legal Ecuadorean institutions, which is a strong support. At the international level, Sarayaku's allies are diverse; from international environmental NGOs, to organizations that defend human rights, to international indigenous people, universities, and persons.

4. Relation with the Ecuadorean and other governments

Sarayaku's fight has engendered many disagreements and complications. Passing through threats, accusations, and even a trial against the Ecuadorean government, the community has never had a painless relation with the local authorities. Below, an explanation of Sarayaku's relations with the Ecuadorean government will be provided⁵⁶, followed by a trial led in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and by the relations with the other governments of the world.

First, the relation between the community and the government has become more complicated through the years. In 2007, in the hope of getting more voice and a better representation of their rights, every indigenous people of Ecuador voted for President Rafael Correa.⁵⁷ His promising speech in favor of the environment, the indigenous people, and the "Buen Vivir" was attractive to them. However, shortly thereafter, the country was submerged into oil exploitation, and the indigenous populations that were not in favor of oil exploitation of their lands, such as Sarayaku, suffered indirect and

⁵⁶ This explanation of Sarayaku's relation with the Ecuadorean government is based on the community's point of view. This work does not take part of anything and is totally neutral.

⁵⁷ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

direct attacks.⁵⁸ They were subjected to pressure through threats, insults, accusations of violence, and of being paramilitaries or terrorists, among others.

A first example occurred when a few years ago, the government sent the army to occupy the territory to pressure Sarayaku to sell its land for oil exploitation.⁵⁹ Another example is when 11 military agents came to the territory without prior consent on 19th December 2016. The community detained the group for a few days until figuring out the reason of its presence.⁶⁰ For its defense, the government did not recognize the agreement of previous consent with Sarayaku and accused it of “violating human rights”.⁶¹ These represent two of many other cases of disagreements with the Ecuadorean government.

Second, in compliance with this disharmonious relation, Sarayaku sued the Ecuadorean government in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The conflict started in 1996 for the concession of the Ecuadorean government of 200,000 acres located in the center-south of the Amazon, to the Argentine oil company *General Company of Fuels* without Sarayaku’s consent. The delivered zone for oil exploitation affected about 60% of their territory.⁶² In 2003, the Kichwa people of Sarayaku sent a complaint to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights together with the Centre of Economic and Social Rights (CDES) and the Centre for Justice and International Law (CEJIL).⁶³ The trial lasted 10 years, and in 2012 the Court’s final sentence favored the Sarayaku.⁶⁴ However, the government has yet to comply with some of the measures adopted by the judgment. For example, it has never respected the previous free

⁵⁸ José Gualinga, March 2017.

⁵⁹ Sabine Bouchat, February 2017.

⁶⁰ El Comercio, 19th December 2016.

⁶¹ El Telégrafo, 22nd December 2016.

⁶² Melo Cevallos, 2016, 10-11.

⁶³ Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2012, 4.

⁶⁴ Melo Cevallos, 2016, 10-11.

informed consultation, which means that the government has to inform Sarayaku before going into its territory and obtain its consent. Nor has it withdrawn the 1,400kg of explosives of the territory.⁶⁵ Many efforts still need to be made.

Finally, as Sarayaku has acted internationally by supporting other struggles, it is logical that the community has had some troubles with other governments.⁶⁶ The conflicts often happen in the form of criticism and do not always come from governments. Actually, the community has received much criticism from international organizations due to its point of view regarding climate change and environmental issues. Nevertheless, it has always managed to remain active (thanks to the support of other organizations) and to maintain its public relations.

To conclude, Sarayaku's struggle for nature and for its territory has brought some troubles to the community, more nationally than internationally. Its relation with the Ecuadorean government has not always been harmonious, considering the numerous disagreements and even the 10-year trial. However, this does not keep Sarayaku from continuing to fight for its cause.

In sum, Sarayaku's international actions have had more impact than the national ones. Although the international actions have allowed Sarayaku to raise the international community's consciousness, the national ones have brought some troubles to the community with the Ecuadorean government. Nevertheless, the numerous alliances have helped Sarayaku to keep fighting for its cause and to maintain its public relations.

⁶⁵José Gualinga, March 2017.

⁶⁶José Gualinga, March 2017.

V. Analysis

This section analyzes the data obtained from the literature review and the interviews with the existent theory about Sarayaku's actions in the national and international arenas. The purpose is to answer if Sarayaku's mobilizations include transnational activism and to know how its cause has molded speeches and transnational activism. This information obtained will lead us to the overall objective.

1. Do Sarayaku's mobilizations include transnational activism?

This investigative work has shown a clear convergence of transnational activism and Sarayaku's actions. Each form of action represents the convergence with transnational activism. Three main points create this link: the network, the strategies, and the other forms of confrontation, such as the aspect of international law.

The first point that converts all the actions into transnational activism is Sarayaku's network of alliances and relations. The conformation of the international grid starts from local bases and the collaboration with NGOs, out to international institutions and other indigenous nationalities. Recording the definition of transnational activism, "this kind of militancy occurs in the form of interaction that are structured in networks"⁶⁷, which clearly means that it involves alliances and relations with actors within and across borders. Hence, as networks are a key part of transnational activism, a link can be established between this one and Sarayaku's network. Sarayaku has built a tissue "consisting of an elite grid, understanding the complexity of the relation of its actors that participate directly and indirectly".⁶⁸ For example, as seen before, Sarayaku is often put in touch with other indigenous movements through NGOs such as Amazon Watch.

⁶⁷ Keck and Sikkink 1998, 1.

⁶⁸ Paz Herrera 2015, 64.

Sarayaku's strategies are also part of transnational activism. Those are mainly characterized by communication and activism through social media, local media, mobilizations, and conferences.⁶⁹ Since it "has been defined as social movements and other civil society organizations and individuals operating across states borders" (Caouette 2005, 1), Sarayaku's strategies clearly transcend states borders. Also, as the strategy can be hold through mobilizations, such as participating in manifestations, this entails collective action, which is characteristic of transnational activism. In that sense, the Kichwa people's strategies engender this kind of militancy.

Finally, the other forms of confrontation, such as prosecuting through international law, are also part of transnational activism. Transnational networks "have contributed to influence the creation of the regime of international law that has installed multiculturalism and the application of the politics of recognition towards Indigenous people. Equally, the activism of these networks is fomented by the existence of this regime" (Paz Herrera 2015, 64). An example is the 10-year trial against the Ecuadorean government regarding oil exploitation. This recourse to international law and negotiation also illustrates a form of pacific activism.

In conclusion, Sarayaku's actions do include transnational activism. Every form of action consists in an element of this kind of militancy. As it was said above, networks are a key part of transnational activism, such as mobilizations, communication, and so on, and Sarayaku implements its strategy through these elements. This is why a link could be established between the mobilizations and transnational activism.

⁶⁹ These strategies were explained in Chapter IV.

2. How has Sarayaku's cause molded speeches and transnational activism?

Sarayaku's actions have resonated so deeply that they have managed to get an impact at the national and international levels. This impact varies, passing through molding speeches and leaving an effect in the transnational activism of the 21st century. We can see these repercussions in a change of the Ecuadorean government's discourse about the community, the awakening consciousness about environment, and a great expansion in transnational activism. These points will be explained below.

The first point of this impact can be found in the Ecuadorean government's speeches about indigenous people.⁷⁰ President Rafael Correa's government, since his entry to power, has spoken in favor of them and the environment. The Constitution of 2008 has shown a clear consideration for nature, which mentions the "Buen Vivir" or *Sumak Kawsay*.⁷¹ In the Constitution, "the State commits itself to the concept of 'Buen Vivir' as a central principle of its politics" (Altmann 2016, 56). The government has always promoted the respect of nature and the importance of indigenous people's cosmovision.

However, through the years, the tone of the speeches has been changing to a more declining one. Sarayaku has had many disagreements with the legal authorities, which has contributed to many critiques towards the community. As mentioned in Chapter III, the "troubles" have been increasing so much between both actors that Sarayaku has received many comments, in the form of direct and indirect insults. Therefore, it can be said that the speeches have deteriorated.

The second point is that Sarayaku's cause and international fight have managed to awaken people's consciousness about environment and indigenous people's struggle. This fact can be considered as the community has participated in important international

⁷⁰ In that case, especially the case of Sarayaku.

⁷¹ "Good Living" in English.

congresses and conferences. These “acts of presence” allowed Sarayaku to express its cause, and directly reach people’s attention. Now, the international community is more aware of what is going on with this indigenous movement, thanks to these activist movements. The people of Sarayaku hope that this could pressure the Ecuadorean government to make changes, such as to stop oil exploitation.

Nevertheless, while the expansion of transnational activism is not only due to Sarayaku, the community truly has contributed to it. Actually, “In the last decades and especially in the 90s, indigenous mobilizations emerged and multiplied in some Latin-American countries” (Paz Herrera 2015, 64). In that way, it can be understood that transnational activism has seen a recent big expansion with indigenous movements. Through its various international actions and its militancy, Sarayaku has managed to make its cause to be known.

To conclude, Sarayaku’s cause has strongly contributed to the expansion of transnational activism and has molded the Ecuadorean government’s speech about the community and its fight in a declining way, but it has been effective. In fact, the indigenous movements’ struggle has provoked conflicts with the legal authority. However, it has also allowed expanding environmental transnational activism and the militancy for indigenous people’s rights, and at the same time, awakened the international community’s consciousness about the situation.

VI. Conclusion

This investigative work has led to two major points: First, Sarayaku is the most internationalized indigenous people of Ecuador in terms of leading a serious struggle to defend its cause. Second, its mobilizations do involve transnational activism. The data obtained through the literature review, the interviews and the analysis have led to the conclusion that the people of Sarayaku’s mobilizations include transnational activism.

Each section provided the information necessary to comply with the overall objective and to verify the hypothesis. Chapter II gave the literature review about transnational activism that promoted a sense of awareness about what it is and its involvements. Chapter III reviewed the existent literature about the indigenous people of Sarayaku and provided more information about these actors. Chapter IV led us to know their international and national actions and their alliances. Finally, the analysis allowed us analyzing the data obtained with the existent theory about Sarayaku's actions in the national and international arenas.

To conclude, the information obtained in each section led us to the two points of this conclusion. First, the Kichwa people of Sarayaku are the indigenous community that has acted the most internationally. Second, they engage in transnational activism along with their allies by addressing international norms to defend their territory and life records. This goes along with the overall objective and then verifies the hypothesis of this paper.

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