

Effects of Migration and Mobility: Mapping Spatial Transformation in the Peri-urban Settlements of Cuenca, Ecuador

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The settlement constellation of parishes or 'parroquias' around Cuenca, a medium-size city in the southern highlands of Ecuador, is steadily urbanizing and transforming. Transnational migration forcefully fuels this process. Remittances facilitate development investments in the rural areas of the Azuay province and catalyze economic and social dynamics. Migration strategies and family support intertwine with other social practices on larger spatial scales, including community systems of water distribution and locally owned transportation services. Similarly, the impact of investments from remittances of migrant families transcends household economies. The enlarged building stock in the parroquias offers housing opportunities for national migrants who seek opportunities in Cuenca. This in turn invigorates dynamics in the social and spatial fabrics of the parroquias, especially in their centers. The paper explores the impact of remittances on the spatial transformation of the parroquias, semi-rural villages in the vicinity of Cuenca. It analyses the particular interplay between age-old livelihoods and imaginaries of successful lifestyles. Extended family dynamics, investment and entrepreneurship are key factors in this interplay with the spatially embedded characteristics of the parroquias.

Keywords: Transnational migration; remittance houses; remittance landscape; peri-urban transformation; migration strategies

PRELUDE

Manuel, a 71-year-old peasant in Baños, was a construction worker for more than fifty years. In the 1960s, he spent long work-seasons on coastal plantations. Three of Manuel's four children live in the United States. Financing the dangerous journeys to the United States got him into debt. However, remittances later allowed him to build his son's houses that he now guards and takes care of. As is true for so many rural households in Azuay, migration is inherently intertwined with Manuel's family

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trajectory. Migration has always been a response to scarcity in the region. It enables financial, cultural and technical means to pour in from the host countries. The impressive investment wave in housing that Cuenca has witnessed for the last thirty years is a result of this migration tradition. This housing investment trend demonstrates that migration is as much a collective as an individual act. It implies movements backwards and forwards and necessarily juxtaposes private, collective and reciprocal practices. As such, the ongoing landscape transformation and housing boom in Azuay results from movements and movements on the rebound, a complex of interacting micro-scale strategies of becoming: becoming a migrant, becoming successful, becoming a returnee, becoming an entrepreneur.

TRANSNATIONAL REMITTANCES RESHAPE THE INTER-ANDEAN LANDSCAPES

Remittances are a major factor in Ecuador's economy (Acosta et al., 2006). Particularly in rural areas, they drastically impact human development investments (León et al., 2007). At the same time, remittances systematically increase over time. Since 1999, only oil exportation revenues have exceeded remittances (Acosta et al., 2006; Cardenas, 2016). Provinces receive a larger part of remittances. For example, Azuay accounts for less than 5% of the national population, but in 2014 received 22% of Ecuador's remittances (El Telegrafo, 2015). Remittances impact agricultural production and rural land-use across the Ecuadorian highlands and especially in southern locations (Gray, 2009a; B. D. Jokisch, 2002; Kyle, 2000; Vasco, 2011). Changes in labor resources and increased income as result of out-migration have indeed "mixed and countervailing effects on smallholder agriculture" (Gray, 2009b). Contrary to conventional assertions that out-migration leads to abandonment of rural lands (Borrero, 2002), most transnational households continue to practice agriculture despite its low profitability. Sometimes even an expansion of agricultural areas has been observed (Gray and Bilsborrow, 2014). Once debts acquired to emigrate are repaid, investment in construction and land receive priority. The resulting massive construction wave is urbanizing much of the rural landscapes of Cañar and Azuay provinces whereby rural landscapes turn into true urbanized landscapes. Patterns of remittance use have positive impacts for transnational households from the southern Ecuadorian highlands in the domains of housing, health care and education. Land improvement or purchase of land is also clearly facilitated by remittances (Mata-Codesal, 2014). Mata-Codesal also notes that there has been an increase in attention to facades as rural housing overtime. Klaufus, who studies the semiotics of mobility, observed how the formal language used in remittance housing resonates with the ideas of social and economic improvement of migrant families. Mobility of people, resources, and ideas, not only generates opportunities for social mobility, but also materialize sediment into materiality (Klaufus, 2012a). This

is surely the case for families in peripheral informal urban settlements of Cuenca (Klaufus, 2012a, 2012b).

Figure 1: Baños landscape of urbanization



Photograph by M. Rivera-Muñoz

This article exposes the agency that mobility and remittances have had in the social and spatial transformation of the peri-urban hinterlands of Cuenca and conversely, how the spatial characteristics of the peri-urban landscape impact the development catalyzed by migration and remittances. Besides landscape transformation, special attention is given to the particular interplay between traditional livelihoods and imaginaries of successful lifestyles and extended family dynamics, torn between traditional systems of reciprocity and care and contemporaneous opportunities, investments and entrepreneurship. The transformation of migrant-sending communities goes beyond improvement of material well-being. The investments of transnational families interplay with socio-spatial structures and stimulate new and existing social practices. Some are oriented to the communities' self-provision of infrastructure. Some practices are age-old like the minga, a form of community work that still exists in the rural Andes, and as well in peripheral and popular urban neighborhoods. Such logics constitute the backbone of current landscape transformation in migrant-sending communities in the southern highlands of Ecuador, and

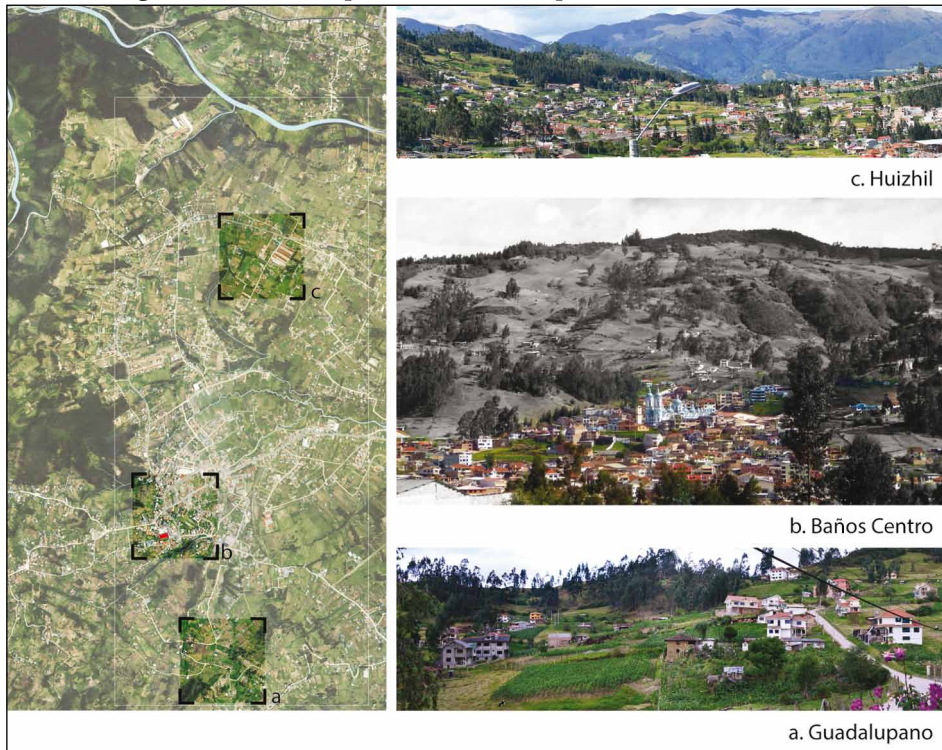
of processes of landscape urbanization around urban centers like Cuenca (see Figure 1). In this article, landscape urbanization is interpreted as the gradual accumulation of built tissue, and ulterior acquisition of urban functions that takes place within productive landscapes. It differs from ‘urban sprawl’¹ in that outward urban expansion from the center only accounts for a part of the new buildup. Landscape urbanization is largely an endogenous process. The local population in the parroquias, stimulated by remittances, generates development in their territories that improves living conditions and resonates with desired lifestyles that combine traditional and modern lifestyles.

Today, the parroquias are simultaneously the landscapes of the ‘new rural’ and also of urban expansion. Especially in the vicinity of the parish centers, they are well-connected and have improved living conditions, served with a relatively dense network of roads, almost universal power service (in the whole country)², community-managed potable water systems, service of mobile telephony, and an improved and expanded internet coverage.

Several questions guide this exploration: How do mobility and migration resonate in physical space and vice versa? How do spatial characteristics anchor, channel or steer investment of remittances? What are the material outcomes and what do they express? How do different actors converge and interact in such spaces in transformation?

CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

Baños is an exemplary case. One of the 21 rural parroquias that surround Cuenca, it has the highest number of transnational emigrants in Azuay province (INEC, 2010). Counterbalancing the exodus of its own migrating population, Baños also receives an influx of low-income rural migrants and mid-income “city people”, for whom this parroquia is an attractive alternative to increasing living costs in the city center. The majority of its more than 17,000 habitants lives in proximity of Cuenca and close to the parroquia center. The population is increasing, which in turn drives its landscape urbanization process. Baños’ territory is 22,000 hectares and its altitude ranges from the 2580 to the 4200 meters above sea level. Only 13% of its territory has slopes lower than 5%, and less than the 11% has slopes between 5 and 12% (GAD Baños, 2015). Steep slopes and fragility of the high mountain ecosystems imply that 70% of Baños territory is not suitable for agriculture. Nonetheless, it does have a high value for water-related ecosystem services. The parroquia is administratively organized in 10 communities (Baños Centro, Huizhil and Guadalupano are three of them), and 34 hamlets, mostly in a dispersed settlement configuration (Figures 2-3). The majority of the settlements are located in the vicinity of the center of the parroquia, between 2500 and 3000 MASL.

Figure 3: Different patterns of landscape urbanization in Baños

Elaborated by M. Rivera-Muñoz, Source: Ortho-photo by Senplades

Migration and mobility: long-term economic strategies in the Andes

Long before Alexander von Humboldt received universal esteem for describing his crossing of the Andes, traversing the Andes was in many ways already part-and-parcel of a way of life for native inhabitants. Andean social structures –with inevitable variations over time and along such a long mountain range– unfolded in a *longue-durée* journey of ‘mutual dependency’ with the mountains³. People occupied and controlled diverse ecological floors or natural environments, nested by the wide range of altitudinal differentiations in the Andes (Dollfus, 1981; Murra, 1975). The altitudinal differentiations delivered a variety and abundance of resources which von Humboldt scientifically documented some two hundred years ago, but actually had been harnessed for centuries.

New political actors reusing old systems of population mobility and control

The Spanish colonial regime dispossessed and displaced indigenous populations from their ancestral lands. The Spanish adopted and generalized two ordering sys-

tems that the Incas had developed to control the vast territory they had conquered the previous century: mitmaq (long-distance resettlement of rebellious people); and reducciones (population regrouping and concentration in new settlements) (Dollfus, 1981; Murra, 1975). Concurrently, the Spaniards' new economy based on the exploitation of both natural resources and labor, and their creation of cities induced new dynamics of population mobility and immobility⁴ in and across the territory.

Mobility, migration and the reconfiguration of the social landscape during colonial times

During the eighteenth century, Bourbon Reforms increased taxes, hampered intercolonial commerce and increased indigenous exploitation. Colonial control in the south was looser than in the northern highlands of today's Ecuador. This triggered intensive southwards migration of impoverished groups, whites and indigenous alike⁵. In general, newcomers settled in Cuenca's periphery, where social constraints were less strict than in the city, and where there was a high percentage of land ownership amongst the indigenous population (Chacon et al., 1982; Palomeque, 1994). This resulted in a kind of mestizaje (mixing of races and cultures) of rural spaces in the hinterland: a space in between city and countryside and in between more strict colonial rule and indigenous culture. In this 'in between', a peasantry of mestizo and poor whites emerged that consolidated the prevalent small landownership in the Cuenca region.

The deeply rooted culture of small landownership in Azuay and Cañar, generated, incrementally and over generations, a culture of patrimony that played an essential role in migration processes. The scale of transnational migration in Ecuador's southern highlands at the end of the twentieth century was directly linked to the asset of landownership. It allowed peasants to bypass the formal credit market whose access was based on employment as a strict credibility criterion. Cash-poor, land-owning peasants could instead acquire fast loans to finance their journey abroad, by pawning property titles to illegal usurious lenders (See Gray, 2009a; B. Jokisch and Pribilsky, 2002).

Modern migrations: reactivating old and tracing new paths of migration

Migration waves became more frequent and broader in spatial scope over time. In the southern highlands, several significant migration waves succeeded each other during the last seventy years. The first wave in the mid-twentieth century concerned rural-urban-migration and intra-regional migration between the highlands and the coast (Chiriboga and ILIS, 1984, 81; Kyle, 2000; Larrea, 1985, 60). The second wave was transnational. It began in the 1960s, gained force in the 1980s, and broadened during the Ecuadorian crisis of the late 1990s.

Male peasants from Azuay and Cañar provinces were the first to migrate in large numbers after the implosion of the toquilla hat industry generated massive unemployment in the 1950s. At first, they resumed seasonal work migration to coastal plantations (initiated during the late nineteenth century), but when the economic crisis became national during the 1980s, they had to look for new destinations. The United States was the main transnational migration destination. The organization of this migration capitalized on international experience and relationships established for hat export (Kyle, 2000)

The national financial crisis of 1998 struck urban and rural populations alike, and triggered the most recent and massive migration wave. Nearly 14% of the working population migrated between 1999 and 2007 (United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA-Ecuador and FLACSO, 2008). This second wave amplified, deepened and radically diversified the already established migration patterns: Spain and Italy became new favorite destinations, women's participation in migration increased drastically, and finally urban and middle class segments of the population supplied the largest migration numbers (Gratton, 2005). Transnational migration reached a new level, expanded the geographic span of action, and intensified its connections. The drastic acceleration and amplification of migration should however not obscure the fact that age-old Andean survival tactics were reproduced. These tactics, as so often, were prompted by necessity. Indeed, precarious peasant economies always incessantly stimulated adaptations and extensions of activity repertoires.

As a result, the landscape became the repository of material inputs and cultural stimuli in the wake of migration. Landscape transformations intensified with population growth and the further distribution of public services and intensification of land occupation, use and division. Mid-century coastal migrations led to the replacement of single-story houses in the hinterlands by more 'urban' typologies: the two-story houses, which were the common type in the parroquia center at the time. The houses of the parroquia center have simultaneously updated their style, functions and materials. The adobe portal house was exchanged for terraced houses with brick loadbearing walls. The terrace provided space for domestic productive activities as plots became smaller. The new typology also accommodated commercial and artisanal activities. In the past, this activity would have taken place outside or in the portals.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF LANDSCAPE

The political landscape as the warp of spatial development

Centuries of mestizaje reduced ethnic differences between what once was categorically distinguished as two distinct 'republics' (Matienzo, 1910/1567; Solórzano Pereira, 1648). But that doesn't imply that differences disappear. Out-of-fashion des-

ignations such as blancos (whites) and gente del pueblo⁶ (common people) persist in local language. In the parroquia, these categorizations are rather fluid and amalgamate ethnicity, social position and geographical location of belonging. Blancos (an epithet often including mestizos) live in the parroquia center and towards the “front” of the parroquia church (as in Huizhil), on the lower and flatter lands. Gente del pueblo refers to indigenous and mestizo. They commonly settle “behind” the parroquia church (as in Guadalupano). They inhabit and cultivate slopes.

The colonial articulation of ethnicity and class⁷ considered European culture inherently superior to native culture and implied differentiated trajectories for people (and subsequently spatial development of their territories), based on their skin color and cultural background. Whites were favored over mestizos, and mestizos over indigenous. This also applied to employment opportunities. In the 1970s, before transnational migration reversed orders, the Huizhil population—mainly consisting of blancos and mestizos, were more likely to establish regular, often even daily connections with the city (as workers, drivers, tailors and so on). Indigenous people mainly occupied the higher and steep lands. Their main income was anchored in agricultural practices, despite the low suitability of their lands for such purposes. Their interactions with the parroquia center and with the city were occasional, rather than daily. Only bricklayers—a common occupation in the parishes—were an exception to this rule, since they commuted daily⁸.

Better roads to the city created accessibility and this implied more economic opportunities. Blancos and mestizos had easier access to formal education and ascended faster socially and economically in the city, hence their dependency on land diminished.

Continuation of agriculture in places like Huizhil is currently more culturally than economically motivated. Where land is still cultivated, chacra⁹ is the dominant crop, because it thrives on infertile soils and requires little labor (Figure 6). It is clear that more intense urban development—in comparison with places like Guadalupano, for example—results from the denser road net, milder topography and people’s less land dependence (resulting in a higher propensity to sell it). Predominantly indigenous places like Guadalupano, on the contrary, demonstrate significantly less development dynamics. Transnational migration impacts the development of these places, particularly since government support has been largely absent. Only collective efforts and private resources have brought change (Figure 4).

Due to its symbolic significance, concentration of services and its good connection with the city, the center of Baños receives the bulk of remittance investments (Figure 5). During the last decades, the steady transformation of the parish center and the incremental growth in the number of under-occupied buildings (because of their absent owners) has stimulated an influx of low-income migrants seeking employment in Cuenca. On the rebound, this influx stimulates more investments in the parroquia. Housing production increases correspondingly.

Baños is the parroquia with the second largest communally-managed potable water system in Azuay province. It supplies 6,500 households, mainly around Baños Centro and the area towards the city that remains below the altitude of the treatment plant. The water supply project, originally intended for a convent, started in the 1950s but soon extended to the whole community for providing irrigation and later, household consumption. Today, the administration of the system is a formal, legally-established institution. Members (users) democratically elect the institution's board.

The project began through weekly mingas to open trenches that conduct water to the parroquia from the spring, located three kilometers uphill. During the 1970s and again in 2000, the system was modernized to augment its capacity. Mingas formed the foundation of the dense network of potable water and roads in the parroquia. The improvement of living conditions in such formerly isolated locations significantly requalified them. They gained recognition as alternative places with a good living standard, which stimulated further development and landscape urbanization.

Figure 4: Guadalupano



Note: Various quality housing intermingles in the patchwork landscape of agricultural production, commercial forest, and pastures. Photograph by M. Rivera-Muñoz

Figure 5: Baños centro



Note: Besides its importance as symbolic center of the parroquia, Baños Centro concentrates most of the parroquia's economic activities and hosts its most well-known attraction, the thermal baths. Photograph by M. Rivera-Muñoz

Figure 6: Huizhil



Note: Huizhil's population has stronger ties with the urban economy and it is less dependent on agriculture. Agricultural activities persist at a small-scale, and focus on low-labor crops like the chara or pastures. Photograph by M. Rivera-Muñoz

Literature often emphasizes the “reproduction of new, autonomous households” as a result of migration (Jokisch and Pribilsky, 2002, 79). Nevertheless, strategies enabling migration most commonly involve entire extended families and intertwine with social practices at other scales, such as *minga*¹⁰.

Rural migrant families always and continuously (re)assemble diverse means to face crisis, combining proven methods and hazardous options, including illegal journeys with people smugglers. Parents provide collateral for loans that relatives, acquaintances, or even the very smugglers offer. Reciprocation is eventually expected, although not necessarily directly to the parents (Perez Guartambel, 2010). The education of younger siblings and support of aging parents are self-evident forms of reciprocity. Lending money to a close relative for a clandestine journey (Jokisch and Kyle, 2010), temporarily accommodating a newcomer, assisting settling and job searches at destinations, are also reciprocity practices that significantly invigorate migration chains within a community. Once the migration endeavor manages to reciprocate the assistance, remittances return and a substantial part of these are invested in construction within the village.

The donation of a plot of land (as an advanced inheritance) reduces costs and time for migrating children to materialize homeownership aspirations and secures returns on the whole household investment. It simultaneously re-connects migrants to their villages and re-articulates lifetime alliances. Parents usually take charge of construction, as if it were a credo in the eventual homecoming of children. In fact, reciprocity intertwines care with expectations and links development with anchorage. Building a house in the Andes equates to build one's life foundations. This also relates to ancient Andean principles of interconnectivity and reciprocity. Kinship intertwines blood ties with shared occupation and use of given lands.

Landscape occupation

Contrary to popular depictions of emigrant households as *nouveau riche*, in practice, received remittances are rather modest¹¹. Successful migration journeys depend on household capacities to articulate a series of support strategies, ranging from emotional support to the maximization of savings and efficient investment of remittances. Strategies of savings maximization include “self-imposed restrictions on expenses” (Mata-Codesal, 2011, 109), continuing or even increasing agricultural production (Gray and Bilsborrow, 2014; B. D. Jokisch, 2002), commercialization (of this production) on city markets and building houses in their places of origin, a choice often criticized (Borrero, 2002; Jaramillo, 2002).

Remittances enable the opening up of new ventures and forms of income, which no longer require the city as an intermediary. In the parroquia center, new manufacturing shops, grocery stores, *café-nets* (telephone and internet booths) and restaurants are funded with resources incoming from migration. In the parroquia, hinterland remittances allow the enlargement of land patrimony. Land remains important for the social and cultural reproduction of the peasant population, but its role also

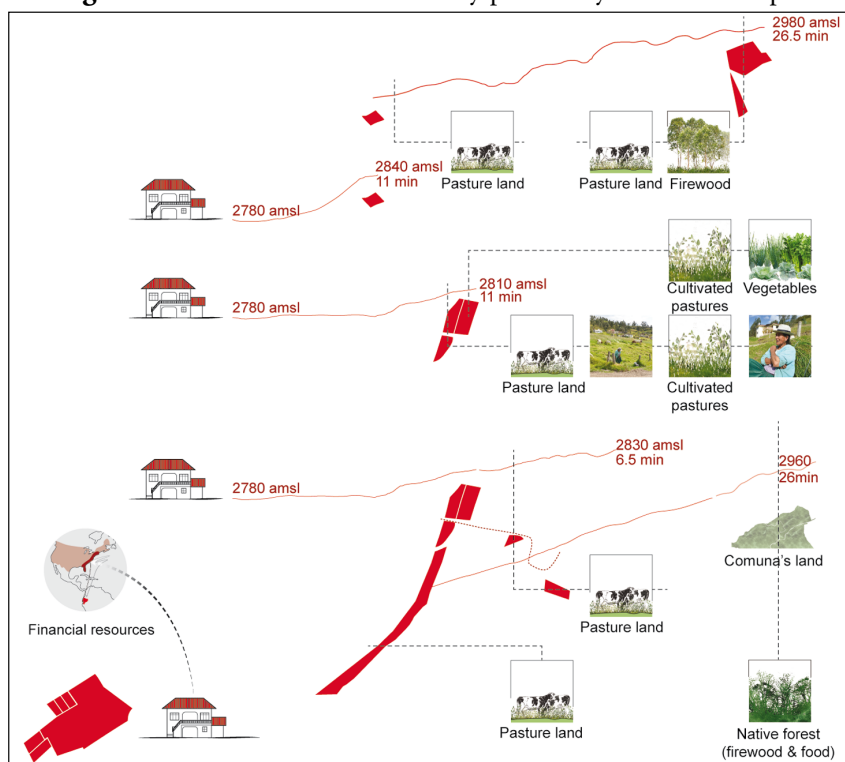
transforms. Use and exchange values often play interrelated roles. For instance, a piece of land can be the collateral to a loan for a new migration trip, or it could be sold in order to finance a car that will generate a new form of income for a family member.

In the following narratives, two exemplary cases (one more urban, the other more rural) are addressed to understand how migrant households who are supported by remittances rearticulate and reproduce, in contemporary modes, age-old practices of multi-locality. In both cases, the city continues to be an important commercial place. However the exchanges (money, communication) between parroquia and abroad are more intense (than with the city), and ultimately structure family actions in the landscape.

Narrative 1: Multi-locality and micro-verticality at the household scale

Without request, Manuel, whose story was told above, was casually offered a loan to migrate. Considering himself too old and having aging parents to take care of, he endorsed his eldest and married son to take the “opportunity”. Manuel’s risky support was hence situated in the context of family ties of care, solidarity and reciprocity. Eventually, his son’s entrepreneurial nature provided the finances for others to make the journey to the United States.

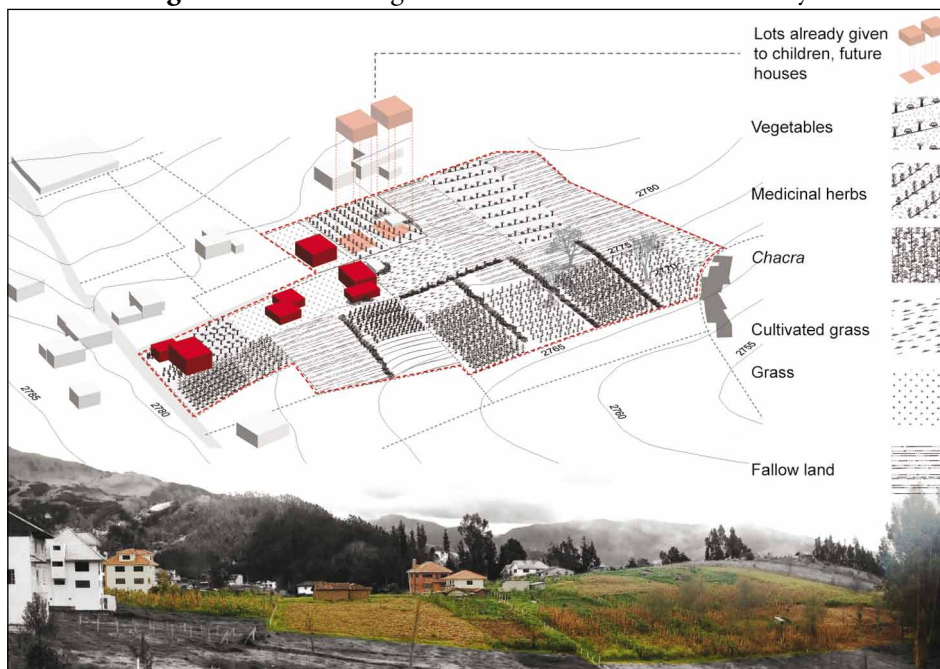
When Manuel was young, he received a plot of land to build his house, as an advanced inheritance from his parents. Similarly, Manuel already donated plots of land to all his children. He hired an architect to obtain construction permits and subsequently took charge of the construction of his sons houses. Manuel’s extended family has received remittances for almost seventeen years now. Nonetheless, agriculture remains central in the family’s everyday life. Two of Manuel’s sons are married and their cash income is managed independently. Manuel is in charge of his single son’s money and investments. The women—Rosa, Ines and Miriam (wife, daughter and daughter-in-law) — take charge of the agricultural activities of the family and Manuel only has a secondary role. Over the years, the family has incorporated new properties to their patrimony. Properties of parents and offspring are interlocked. Parcels vary in size and suitability. Most of the land is dedicated to pastures, given the steep slopes. The family arranges who uses which piece of land and for what kind of production, regardless of formal ownership titles. Similarly, tacit agreements are central to the fair distribution of labor between family members (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Construction of the family patrimony: A rural example

Note: After a main house is built, remittances are invested in land. The variety of altitudes of the acquired new plots provides the household with a diversity of resources. To make use of those resources, household members engage in journeys that in a micro-scale reproduce the vertical control of ecosystems. Elaborated by M. Rivera-Muñoz

The houses of Manuel's family cluster around his parents' house, and are close to the best agricultural lands, on and around which everyday activities center, which include daily or weekly communication with members abroad (Figure 8). The grandchildren of Manuel and Rosa regularly help with agricultural chores, but education is clearly their priority. While migration is considered by many families the only way out of poverty, it is simultaneously considered merely a temporary measure, a means of transition, rather than a goal. Education on the other hand, is regarded as a definitive mode of social and economic mobility.

Figure 8: The housing cluster of Manuel's extended family

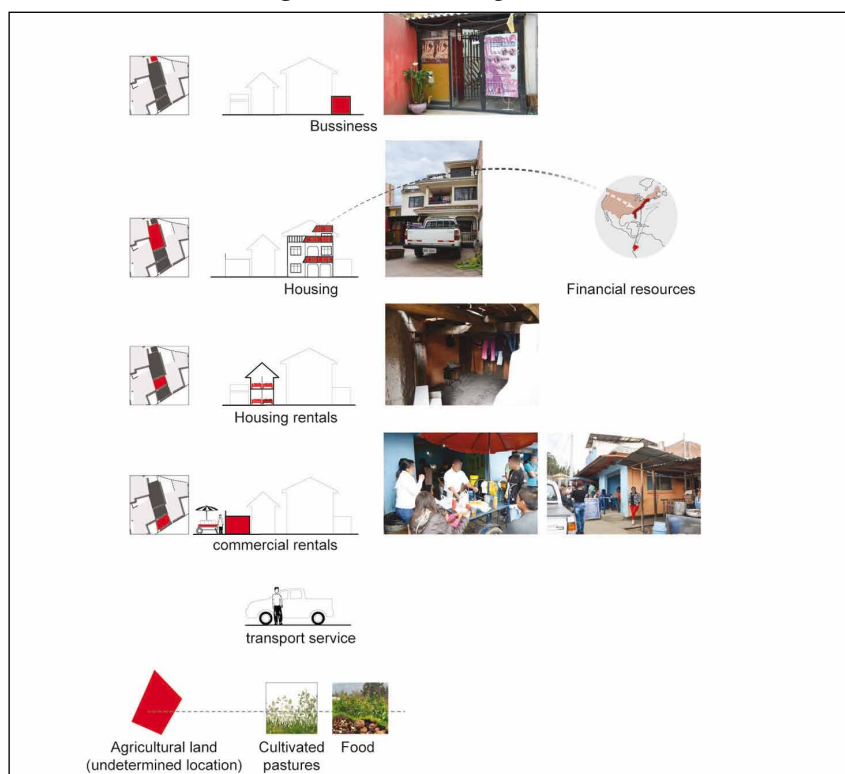


Note: The practice of giving to offspring, as advanced inheritance, a plot of land to build a house, contributes to the reduction of costs and time and crystallizes aspirations of homeownership. Given plots are subdivisions of the family patrimony and are preferentially located in the closeness of the parents' house, forming clusters, or towards main roads. In both cases, houses are placed in order to preserve land for cultivation.

Narrative 2: Filling the voids. The dynamics of absent owners and vacant houses

The amount of vacant housing that emigrants' investments generate in rural locations is frequently criticized as unwise by urban dwellers and observers alike. There is clearly a tension between uses, needs or aspirations and the amount of structures produced. It is most likely the first time in history that such a rural society of subsistence farming has an enduring experience of surplus means that consequently have to be invested. Vacant buildings offer cheaper housing for low-income national migrants looking to work in Cuenca, or to fill the labor niches left by international emigrants in the rural areas.

Every day, Memo sells ceviche¹² in a shop he rents in the center of Baños. He decided to move here eight years ago, encouraged by kin already residing in the parroquia. The shop that Memo rents belongs to Daisy, who lives with her family and mother in a house owned by one of her three brothers who lives in the United States. Daisy manages her brother's assets, together with her own and her parents' (Figure 9).

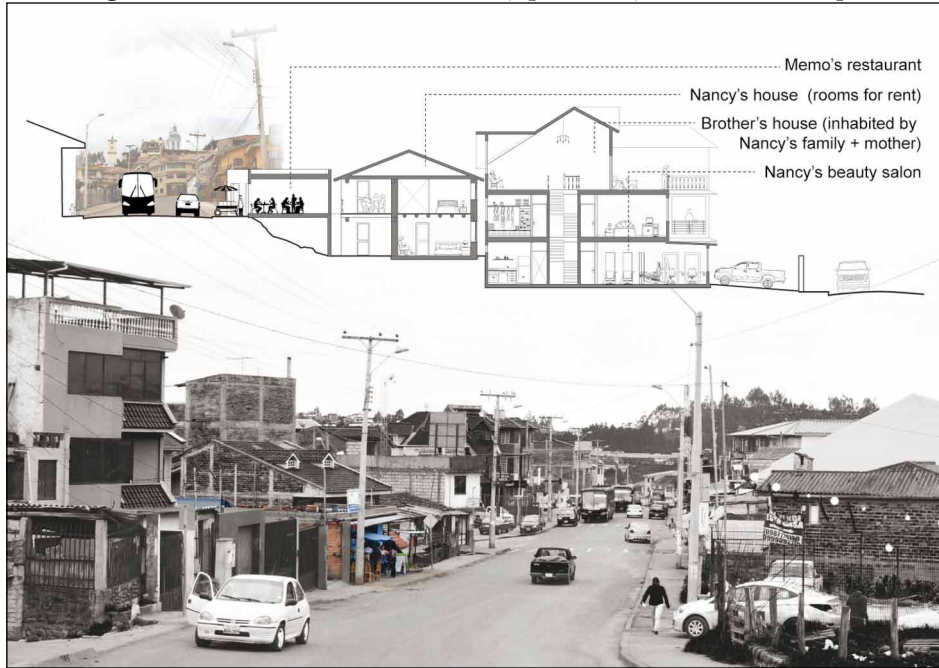
Figure 9: Assembling incomes

Note: Emigrants' investments have a decisive role in improving the living conditions and increasing economic opportunities for extended families. Taking care of a migrant's house or belongings renews family ties and reciprocity relations between members of migrant and non-migrant households. This relation fluctuates between reciprocity, interdependency and personal economic convenience. Elaborated by M. Rivera-Muñoz

In addition to Memo's shop, Daisy rents several rooms in the old house behind it. She also runs a hairdresser salon in the house where she lives. Her husband acquired a pick-up truck and became partner in a transportation company in the parroquia, whose membership fee he paid with the help of a loan he accessed by mortgaging a property of his in-laws. All of this illustrates the decisive role of emigrants' investments. They improve living conditions, increase economic opportunities for the extended family, and simultaneously strengthen their ties (Figure 10). The house of a single emigrant is usually inhabited by parents, but the asset can also provide economic buffer to other family members, for whom the emigration period is a grace period to explore economic opportunities and stabilize an individual household. However, at some point, emigrants are expected to become benefactors. Financing the construction of a house, which demonstrates an improved economy, is an element that strengthens the image of the migrant as a moral figure. Sponsoring

community initiatives, like mingas or religious festivities, are also ways in which transnational families symbolically enact their absent beloved's presence and their multi-local family identity.

Figure 10: Construction of the family patrimony: An urban example



Note: The impact of transnational remittances in rural and peri-urban territories goes beyond material assets. Houses constructed through remittances become spatial resources for the village, and trigger further multi-directional mobility and migrations, stimulating synergies that expand the array of possibilities for parish dwellers and newcomers. They reshape the morphological and social patterns of occupation and activate landscape urbanization. Elaborated by M. Rivera-Muñoz

Landscape urbanization

The causes for landscape urbanization are multiple in nature and origin. It can be partially attributed to the improved connectivity and consequent development of rural territories due to public investment in the national road system during the last years and the private investment of remittances of transnational families. Other causes intermingle global (capitalist urbanization) and local rationalities, which are explained below.

Housing transformation across migratory trajectories

As previously observed, migrants' houses in Baños are shockingly larger than traditional adobe constructions (Figure 3a), (B. Jokisch and Kyle, 2005; Klaufus, 2012b; Mata-Codesal, 2014). However, they are not particularly extravagant¹³ compared to the average house in the city. Three decades of remittances improved economic capacities and reshaped lifestyles has clearly transformed the architectural language in Baños, with a similar force of previous migration waves. The contemporary architecture seeks to demonstrate acquired prosperity and economic improvement.

The Spanish grid of Cuenca accommodated urban development until the first half of the twentieth century, when regional migration catalyzed urban expansion. A first development plan was made in 1949. By the 1960s, new avenues and urban blocks started to emerge. At that time, parroquias were still remote rural places, connected by a single road, along which ribbon development occurred at the village entrance. By the end of the 70s, new settlement in Baños clustered along the new road connecting Cuenca-Huizhil-Baños. The road improved access to the urban markets, which in turn stimulated the diversification and extension of activities of peasant households. The realization of the north-west section of Cuenca's ring road opened up a new development front, that was exploited in the 1980s, when remittances infused a continuous financial flow into the regional economy. The expansion of public services such as potable water further encouraged urbanization, including remoter locations beyond and higher than the parroquia center. Currently a new water treatment plant, at a higher altitude, is under construction. It will undoubtedly trigger development in a whole new area further west of the parroquia center.

Land, in the in-between territory (between Cuenca and the countryside), is essentially the main patrimony of the local population. It evidently has an important use value. For migrant-households it also offers a safe investment option¹⁴. Remittances allow families to extend their patrimony and simultaneously to dynamize its use. Unsurprisingly, the remittance boom has increased land prices in Azuay and Cañar (B. D. Jokisch, 2002; Klaufus, 2006; Mata-Codesal, 2011). Transnational migrants families are a major, but not the only party, on the land market in rural Cañar and Azuay provinces that has been turned into – as Jokisch asserts – “a peri-urban, even gentrified, landscape of cultivated real estate” (2002, 523). In locations such as Baños, close to the city and with basic service provision, the struggle for land has to a large extent also become a fight with land speculation and real-estate-driven urbanization (Figure 11). Rural land is promoted and bought as investment for future urbanization. Remittances provide for financial stability, and enable rural migrants to resist displacement that capitalist urbanization normally entails, ultimately allowing them to live the ‘urban’ landscape they have self-constructed over a long time period.

Figure 11: Blind pockets in the urbanizing landscape



Note: Real-estate developers target rural lands with good road connectivity and services. Existing condominium laws allow the circumvention of rural land use regulations and avoidance of extra payments for public services, all in a way to increase profits. Photograph by M. Rivera-Muñoz

CONCLUSION: REWRITING PRACTICES OF RESISTANCE

The qualities of flexibility, as well as necessity to adjust and adapt to changing circumstances, shatter conventional depictions of peasant culture as a world of slowness and stagnation. Migration has always been an economic strategy of rural societies. However, in the past decades it has acquired larger scales and reached towards new horizons. Migration is, for inhabitants of the parroquia, a life-changing decision to be taken while they are still young. Successful migration invariably generates spatial transformations in the place of origin. It usually enlarges the family patrimony as an asset, which is as well utilized more dynamically. As such, it increases the capacity of family members to support themselves and others in various development trajectories.

Migration is not only a personal endeavor, but simultaneously an extended family project. Local and host-country social and economic networks enable and support migration journeys. In turn, these migration endeavors strengthen the home context through remittances and investments in land and building. As such, migrations iteratively improve personal and collective conditions, as well as use, expand

and renew support networks. The landscape becomes the repository of incremental spatial transformations that are a result of this iterative process: between migrations to ever-further host-countries, and investments in the ever more locally anchored places of belonging.

Transnational migration and associated economic mobility empower the most vulnerable peasant groups (remotely located and indigenous). It allows them to break social structures imposed by centuries-old traditions and regulations that once blocked personal and economic development. Economic betterment opens the gate to social mobility. This includes increased mixture between formerly distant social groups, blurring ethnic-based social division.

The longer migration continues and the more successful it is, the more family patrimony is fed by remittances and the more development dynamics it can support. Construction is an evident investment outlet, but remittances are also invested in commerce and service shops, cars, vans and trucks or machinery and equipment for small-scale enterprises within the parroquia. In turn, these investments engender a multitude of trajectories often interwoven and in synergy with one another. As a result, the array of possibilities for parroquia dwellers (old and newcomers alike) expands. The parroquia population fosters a sense of progress and overall regained self-assurance.

Migration organization and support practices of rural (extended) households, unfold across localities and continents. They can be qualified as acts of resistance, because they invigorate rural households to take over their own affairs, turning them into “purposeful decision makers” instead of “powerless and disenfranchised” victims (Conway and Cohen, 1998) that passively accept social and economic inequalities that have existed since colonial rule. Indeed, migrant families claim and take real control over their territory¹⁵. Building it, developing it, incrementally turning it into a firm fabric is part-and-parcel of gaining control. As it always has been, the right to the city is not so much a benefit or privilege that one obtains by invoking it, but something one acquires through the active production of the city.

The improvement of services, opening of roads and overall connectivity in Cuenca's parroquias turned centuries-old peasant territories into ‘potential’ residential landscapes, where urban expansion and productive activities compete for the same space. Already today, sites such as Huizhil attract middle-class households. Transnational remittances help local families to compete and resist expulsion. As such, migration is instrumental to sustain a socio-economic mix, while preserving social networks.

The impact of transnational remittances in rural and peri-urban territories transcends the material enrichment of migrant-sending households. Family and communal strategies practiced across scales, and the investments that transnational families make, strengthen their agency in territories. As a result, communities experience improved self-esteem as a community, and accordingly redefine their collective identity. The collective identity resonates more than ever in the materiality of the

fabric they incrementally weave, in eternally repeated iterations between migration endeavors and remittance investments, between ever-more global flows and ironically ever-more anchored reproductions of locality.

NOTES

1. This article uses spatial description of urban sprawl following Inostroza, Baur and Csaplovics (2013, 88): "Urban sprawl has been defined as growth by the creation of new low-density suburbs with detached or semi-detached housing and large commercial strips. (...). It is patchy, scattered and strung out, with a tendency for discontinuity, and it leap-frogs over areas leaving agricultural or open space enclaves behind."
2. 99.64% of households in Cuenca, and 96.92% in Baños have public power service (INEC, 2010).
3. As Echeverría succinctly elaborates on Braudel's notions, there is a relation of dependency, a parasitism that reciprocally ties humans and nature, and thus, it primitively constitutes the election of a mode of civilization (2013, 29).
4. The colonial regime imposed various ways of forced labor and bonded servitude to the indigenous population. After independence, Republican laws concealed the continuation of systems of indigenous exploitation. The agrarian reforms of 1964 and 1973 finally abolished debt peonage and huasipungo, the most persistent modes of workforce capture. Huasipungo was a parcel of land given by a landowner to a worker in exchange for days of free farm work.
5. Although indigenous community abandonment didn't begin during this period, it experienced an important wave. In Azuay and Cañar this was especially important, registering proportions of 30% versus 70% of local indigenous people versus forasteros or migrant indigenous people respectively (see Poloni-Simard, 2006).
6. The terminology used in this paper to differentiate population groups emerges from the ways in which the Baños people refers to themselves and/or to others, and it is used only when such distinction is relevant to explain the political landscape in the parish.
7. This notion has been identified and studied in Cuenca by several authors(see: Hirschkind, 1980; Klaufus, 2012a; Kyle, 2000; Lowder, 2003; Miles, 1994; Poloni-Simard, 2006).
8. Public transport service started in Baños Centro during the early 1950s.
9. A traditional Andean form of cultivation that combines the cultivation of corn with a variety of legumes and tubers.
10. Mingas are also a common way to gather labor for the construction of a house in the rural areas. In urban popular neighborhoods, mingas are often carried out in public areas, like parks, for construction as well as for maintenance works.

11. The average monthly remittance coming from United States and Spain in 2009 was 299 USD and 516 USD correspondingly (Maldonado and Saldaña, 2010). For the same year, the local minimum wage was 218 USD and the food basket reached an average of 528 USD (Varela, 2011).
12. Traditional coastal dish prepared with fish or seafood.
13. In general, it can be said that extravaganzas were much more common in earlier phases of transnational migration than in Guadalupeño. The derogative epithet of “migrant houses” that such houses received implied that owners were low-educated people and may have influenced the adoption of the more controlled expressions of the remittance houses today.
14. The banking crisis between 1998 and 1999, led to State intervention in 16 of the 40 banks then operating in the country, many of which were finally closed (Lafuente, 2001). Since then, the lack of trust in the Ecuadorian banking system persists – especially in big banks– in opposition to the small credit unions that have since thrived.
15. “We conceptualize household negotiating, family-network development, people’s mobility, remittances, and recipient investments as self-determined and relatively autonomous “resistance” actions of people attempting to survive in a crisis-ridden structure of dependent capitalist relationships, with all their accompanying hostility and destructive potential (...). Such purposive action even by those with little space to maneuver is empowering. Vulnerable they may remain, but not totally bereft of options” (Conway and Cohen, 1998, 33).

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