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OTAVALAN WOMEN WEAVERS: RETHINKING GENDERED LABOR AND CRAFTS IN ECUADOR

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OTAVALAN WOMEN WEAVERS: RETHINKING GENDERED LABOR AND
CRAFTS IN ECUADOR

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of [Doctor of Philosophy] in the
[College of Arts and Sciences]
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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and Dr. Carmen Martínez Novo, Professor of Anthropology

Lexington, Kentucky

2022

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

OTAVALAN WOMEN WEAVERS: RETHINKING GENDERED LABOR AND CRAFTS IN ECUADOR

This research focuses on the gendered labor of craft production and distribution of Otavaleños, an indigenous group in the Imbabura Valley in the Andes Mountains of Ecuador. Otavalans are often described as a society of weavers with strong gender divisions. Households typically function as units of production, with tasks ideally broken down along gender lines. Women are generally depicted as secondary workers who do not weave the textiles that make Otavalans famous; however, they are generally perceived as being responsible for selling these textiles in the market. This research argues that current gendered labor relations in Otavalan textile production can be understood as historically shaped by colonial *obrajes*, or “textile sweatshops,” in which indigenous people were forced to serve labor quotas for the Spanish crown. The contemporary idea that men should be the primary weavers is rooted in the *obraje* system, which required men to weave on floor looms in the Spanish tradition. Spanish-run *obrajes* treated men as representatives of their households, regardless of who actually fulfilled the labor quota. It is necessary to revisit and revise earlier works on gender and crafts in Otavalo to account for possible changes in gendered labor regarding production and distribution, and the implications of those changes for Otavalans today. The methods used in this research included participant observation, ethnographic interviews, family histories, and a modified form of photovoice.

This research contributes to the literature on Otavalan craft production by focusing on women’s activities and changing valorization of women’s roles, and also on market strategies (essential to livelihoods) that rely on the commodification of ethnicity, indigeneity, and performance of heritage. As Otavalan women’s work marketing crafts is documented, particular attention is paid in this dissertation to their market knowledge; their responses to the increasing presence of mass-produced imported goods competing with locally produced crafts in the marketplace; the performance of heritage and indigeneity for tourists; and relationships with new immigrants from Venezuela occupying the same economic sector. This research describes how global pressures and the push to commodify ethnicity encourage female craft production, and how that, in turn, transforms gender relations, as well as the consequences of those changes. Along with gendered stereotypes being critically examined in this dissertation is a political

ecological consideration of how stereotypes of indigeneity and land stewardship can mask larger patterns of exploitation of both natural resources and indigenous labor.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Indigeneity, Identity, Crafts, Labor, Political Ecology

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04/29/2022

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Summary

This research focuses on the gendered labor of craft production and craft distribution by Otavalans, an indigenous group in the Imbabura Valley in the Andes Mountains of Ecuador. Although they are politicians, activists, musicians, and entrepreneurs, much of the literature presents Otavalans as a society of weavers with strong gender divisions (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 2002; Kyle 1999; Kyle 2000). Because of their tremendous skills at weaving, Otavalans have long been recognized as artisans (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:17). Scholars agree that households function as units of production, with tasks ideally broken down along gender lines (Salomon 1981; Salomon 1983; Borchardt de Moreno 1995; Kyle 1999; Kyle 2000; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 1997; Meisch 2002). Typically, women are described as secondary workers who do not weave the textiles that make Otavalans famous (Salomon 1981; Salomon 1983; Borchardt de Moreno 1995; Kyle 1999; Kyle 2000; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 1997; Meisch 2002); however, they are generally responsible for selling these textiles in the market, since sales are considered to be social interactions and it is presumed that women are more skilled at engaging in social interactions (Plattner 1989:209). As de la Cadena explains, it is not uncommon for women to sell goods, but selling items is devalued as a form of labor because it is perceived as simple, and not physically or mentally demanding (1995:334). When coupled with the notion of women being considered “more Indian” (de la Cadena 1995), female indigenous vendors’ knowledge and skills are likely overlooked by both locals and scholars.

This research argues that women have been neglected in existing literature as craft producers because they do not typically weave textiles on floor looms. Production is associated with heritage-making and the performance of ethnicity, and as such, it is tied to indigeneity, while selling goods is associated with capitalism and connotations of corruption of indigeneity in stereotypical and problematic timeless imaginings of indigeneity (Martínez Novo personal communication; Shlossberg 2015). Further, I believe that gendered labor in craft production and distribution is changing due to

external market influences. Indigenous women crochet and knit and are involved in other steps of textile production beyond the act of weaving. Additionally, women are capable of weaving and may do so if circumstances arise, which I have witnessed. This research investigates how Otavalan women are navigating craft work and identity in relation to changing market conditions. Textiles have always been important for Andean cultures (Arnold and Dransart 2014), and changes in the gendered labor of textile production is likely a reflection of larger cultural changes. Kingsolver and Balasundaram write, “we have found that one of the most powerful means of sharing experiences across mountain regions is through art” (2018:5). While textiles and crafts are typically considered utilitarian items rather than art, I argue that Otavalan crafts are an artform that communicate messages and experiences for producers, vendors, and consumers. Since “Artists are important to envisioning futures in global mountain regions” (Kingsolver and Balasundaram 2018:365), Otavalan artisans, and the younger generation in particular, play a poignant role in imagining and shaping the future of Ecuador.

Further, this research argues that contemporary gendered labor relations in regard to textile production can be understood as a legacy of colonial *obrajes*, or “textile sweatshops,” in which indigenous people were forced to serve labor quotas for the Spanish crown predominantly during the 16th and 17th centuries (Meisch 2002:3; Phelan 1967:66). I argue that the contemporary idea that men should be the primary weavers was ingrained in families through the *obraje* system, which required men to weave on floor looms in the Spanish tradition. Spanish-run *obrajes* treated men as representatives of their households, regardless of who actually fulfilled the labor quota. This contrasted with pre-Columbian indigenous conceptions of gender and authority, which is explored further in Chapter 3.

In earlier research with Otavalan women, I learned that utilizing successful marketing strategies that may rely on the commodification of ethnicity are essential for economic survival. Since most of the literature has focused on Otavalan men’s craft work, this study of Otavalan women’s involvement with craft is a contribution to the existing interdisciplinary literature on Otavalan communities. It is necessary to revisit and revise earlier works on gender and crafts in Otavalo to fill in existing gaps in the literature about women as craft producers and to account for possible changes in

gendered labor regarding production and distribution, as well as the impact of those changes on Otavalan communities.

Further, Otavalan craft production and distribution is central to understanding inter-ethnic relations and power relations in Ecuador, although I do not focus primarily on the state context in this dissertation but on the more local context of Otavalan women's craft work. Recently, there has been an influx of foreign goods and informal vendors into Ecuadorian markets, which are changing relationships between vending and identity in Otavalan communities. I use a political ecological framework in the final chapters of the dissertation to contextualize the changing relationship between mountain residents, their material environment, and local and transnational markets. Tensions about authenticity and craft market niches have arisen as a result of the Venezuelan refugee crisis, which has resulted in large numbers of Venezuelans participating as informal vendors in the Ecuadorian markets in which Otavalan women are selling crafts.

1.2 Terminology and Language

My doctoral dissertation research was conducted in the town of San Luis de Otavalo, commonly called Otavalo, in the highlands of Ecuador. There are several small communities in the Imbabura Valley, populated by indigenous people (known as the Otavalo), in addition to *mestizos*, or people identifying as mixed race, and those identifying as white. Despite the different names of the communities, all of these indigenous or *indígenas* (the word is masculine in Spanish but refers to indigenous people of all genders) people will be described as Otavalans, Otavalos, or Otavaleños in this research because this is how they self-identify and are referenced in the literature.

Research was conducted in Spanish. I have a professional working proficiency of the Spanish language, according to the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale. In 2017, my language skills were assessed and deemed proficient in the Foreign Language Evaluation for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program application. I chose to conduct my research in Spanish rather than Kichwa because there is pervasive distrust of outsiders learning Kichwa, rooted in the fear that outsiders have ulterior motives (a historical example: spying for the government or how *hacienda* owners used Kichwa to communicate with workers) (Martínez Novo personal communication). Whenever

interlocutors wanted to teach me words in Kichwa, I made an effort to write them down, learn them, and use them when possible. In this way, interlocutors were able to decide what words I should and should not know and encourage my informal learning, without feeling as though I had appropriated their language in an effort to spy on them. I reciprocated by teaching my interlocutors words and phrases in English, as they expressed interest in expanding their English vocabulary to better engage tourists visiting the market.

When appropriate, Spanish and Kichwa terms will be utilized throughout this dissertation and indicated by italicized text, although the majority of interviews and findings have been translated into English for reader accessibility. Although there are now standardized spellings for Kichwa (also written as Quichua) words created by indigenous linguists, ethno-linguists, and the Ecuadorian education system in the early 1980s, the standardized Kichwa spelling coexists with previous spelling(s) influenced by the Spanish language. Therefore, spellings of Kichwa words throughout this dissertation will vary depending on the original source.

For this dissertation to be accessible to a general readership, I will define some basic weaving terminology here. In regard to weaving terminology describing different types of looms, the literature is inconsistent, except when it comes to backstrap weaving (explained below). Different terms are used to describe the same technology in different parts of the world or at different time periods. Further, my interlocutors often describe weaving technology and techniques differently than they are described in the literature. Therefore, I have consulted with weavers in the U.S. and in Ecuador to determine the terminology I will be using throughout this dissertation. A special thanks to Christina Pappas and to the members of the Enchanted Mountain Weavers Guild for their input regarding weaving terminology. If my terminology differs from that of the original source of literature, I will explain the difference in terminology.

Backstrap weaving refers to weaving technology that relies on 1-2 posts (ex: a beam in one's home or a tree) and a person's body to form a loom (See Figure 1.1). Although a man is depicted in the mural, historically, Otavalan women would have been the weavers using backstrap looms. Peguche Wasi is a workshop/museum/store located in Peguche (the main production town for Otavalan textiles). Because their purpose is to

preserve historical craft knowledge and promote an appreciation for it to both tourists and locals, I have used the actual name of the location, rather than assigning a pseudonym. This site was the only location where I saw backstrap weaving demonstrated in person, in addition to the mural depiction. In backstrap weaving, the textile in process is tied to the post and wrapped around the seated weaver's back during the weaving process. The weaver's body creates the tension on threads of the textile, which shapes how the textile is formed. A textile can only be as wide as the loom on which it is created. The mural is somewhat unusual because the textile it depicts is wider than most textiles produced on backstrap looms, as it is difficult for the weaver to reach both sides while maintaining even tension on the threads. Because the weaver's body is part of the loom, backstrap weaving occurs in narrow strips that allow for the weaver to maintain even tension on the threads while reaching the edges of the textile; because the weaver is usually seated fairly near to the posts with no way of advancing the textile, backstrap weaving also occurs in shorter sections. By contrast, floor looms and machined looms have cylinders on the back of the loom around which are wrapped the woven textiles to allow for longer woven cloth. These smaller woven cloths produced from backstrap weaving must then be sewn together to create larger textiles and fabrics, like clothing or blankets.



Figure 1.1 This mural at Peguche Wasi, a workshop/museum/store, depicts backstrap weaving. Notice the strap going behind the Otavalan man's back, making the weaver's body part of the loom. [Author photo]

Backstrap weaving is the lone form of weaving technology that is described consistently among Otavalans, other weavers, and in the literature. The reason the definition of backstrap weaving is so consistent is that this is a historical production technique that is utilized currently as a showpiece for exoticized representations of authenticity. Backstrap weaving is almost never used today in Otavalo for production purposes. I only observed backstrap weaving during intentional demonstrations at a workshop/museum/store, the purpose of which was to demonstrate the weaving technique rather than to produce a quantity of textiles. I have described backstrap weaving here because the agreed upon definition is significant and because it serves as a historical reference point for a production technique that is no longer in practice. This is considered the lowest tech for producing textiles in Otavalo. While it is time consuming to create fabric on a backstrap loom and then sew it into useful cloth, backstrap weaving remains a showpiece for exoticized representations of authenticity for indigenous textile producers in the Andes.

Throughout this dissertation, I will use the broad term '*floor looms*' to encompass the more specific terms "wooden floor looms" (a phrase frequently used by my interlocutors), "Spanish floor looms" (a phrase used in the literature), and "treadle looms" (a phrase used in the literature and by weavers around the world). A floor loom sits on the floor, is made of wood, and varies in size (See Figures 1.2, 1.3). Smaller wooden looms exist that can be used on top of tables, but these are not found in Otavalo. Thus, the term "wooden floor loom" is unnecessarily redundant for the purposes of this dissertation, despite it being used frequently by my interlocutors. I have instead chosen a broader term that is intelligible to weavers and non-weavers alike.



Figure 1.2 Modified photovoice methodology photo, showing hand weaving ponchos on a floor loom at the family's small production site.



Figure 1.3 Andrea and her mother, Elena, (pseudonyms) taught me how to weave on the same floor loom. Andrea took this photo on my camera in 2014, prior to my implementation of the modified photovoice methodology.

A floor loom is imported technology from Spain, which is considered higher tech than backstrap weaving and lower tech than machinated hand weaving (a term I will define below). It is powered by an individual's hands and feet: the hands pass yarn back

and forth through channels to weave the design, while the feet press on various treadles, or foot pedals, to create the open channels between different harnesses, or frames that hold the threads. Floor looms have different numbers of treadles and harnesses, which impacts the complexity of the designs that can be created. Weavers (excluding my Otavalan interlocutors) will often refer to a loom by the number of treadles or harnesses it has; for example, a four-treadle loom or a two-harness loom. While these terms provide shortcuts in understanding for weavers worldwide, these terms require a level of knowledge that readers of this dissertation do not need to possess. While there is certainly more complexity and nuance to various floor looms, this basic explanation is sufficient because they are used so rarely in Peguche. Rather, floor looms stand as a category of weaving technology that is an important point in history between backstrap looms and machinated hand weaving. Further, floor looms are used in this dissertation primarily as a category of weaving technology that is contrasted with machinated hand weaving.

Throughout this dissertation, I will use the paradoxical term ‘*machinated hand weaving*’ to describe production using the “machinated looms” or “electric looms” that can be found in textile production sites throughout Peguche. Rather than using “machinated looms” or “electric looms” – which more closely align with the terms used in the literature and by my interlocutors – I have chosen to use the term machinated hand weaving because it highlights this as a hybrid weaving technology (See Figures 1.4, 1.5, 1.6). Machinated hand weaving is not fully handwoven, but it is not fully industrialized. While looms are mechanized and operated with electricity and sometimes with computer programming, production still occurs in a cottage economy; while the scale of production is higher than that of backstrap weaving or floor looms, it is much lower than large-scale factories that make most of the world’s textiles. Thus, machinated hand weaving highlights the weaving technology prevalent in Peguche as different than a large-scale textile factory with giant industrial looms and weaving apparatuses. Further, machinated hand weaving also requires a weaver to control the machines, control the designs, make adjustments, and make operating decisions. Machinated hand weaving is not fully automated or fully industrialized and requires skilled weavers with knowledge both of weaving techniques and of machinery.



Figure 1.4 Modified photovoice methodology photo, taken by Pilar and Eduardo at their family's production site. Notice the size of the production space to accommodate the large machinated loom. Not pictured: Workers operating these machines must monitor them to ensure there are no issues during machinated hand weaving.



Figure 1.5 Machinated hand weaving is operated either via cylinders with holes (top of photo) or computer programs (See Figure 1.6). The sequence of holes in these cylinders dictates the design that will be woven. [Author photo]



Figure 1.6 Machinated hand weaving is operated either via computer programs (bottom left corner) or cylinders with holes (See Figure 1.5). Once a design has been programmed into the computer, the weaver presses the button, and the machinated loom creates the design. These machines are the most expensive weaving technology used in Peguche. Miguel took this photo on my camera in 2017.

The term “machinated hand weaving” allows us to understand that for many Otavaleños, machinated hand weaving is tied to the tradition of handweaving and family-made items, which are related to Otavalan vending strategies, even as this contrasts with American notions of ‘handmade’ [indicating small scale production, often without the use of machinery]. The term machinated hand weaving is also connected to the notion of authenticity and indigenous peoples as unchanging relics of the past, which are key themes discussed throughout this dissertation.

1.3 Research Questions

The relationship between gendered labor, identity, indigeneity, and the perception of others – including indigenous and non-indigenous community members and tourists – inform this research. In my doctoral dissertation project, I asked: What kind of work do Otavalan women do, and which forms of labor are rendered visible and invisible to different parties (especially regarding gendered labor in craft production and vending)? How are Otavalan women navigating changing market conditions, and how does that relate to their identity as indigenous Otavalan women and the commodification of this

identity? What strategies are used for the intergenerational transmission of craft and market knowledge, in light of the incorporation of more imported goods and changing generational career aspirations?

1.4 Research Schedule and Methodology

My doctoral dissertation project consisted of nine months conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Peguche and Otavalo, Ecuador (Phase I: July-October 2017 and Phase II: June-December 2018). It was not longer than that because of changes to Ecuadorian visa rules, which will be discussed in detail below. This dissertation research built upon research begun during previous research trips to Ecuador (undergraduate research in summer 2009 and pre-dissertation research in summer 2014). Consent was obtained from research interlocutors for their participation in this research. Still, to protect their identities, pseudonyms have been used for all individuals, while the actual names of locations are utilized. While photographs are important to this dissertation to portray material culture, I have intentionally made limited use of photographs that show faces, as that would detract from efforts to anonymize research interlocutors. Photographs that do show Otavalans' faces were taken by interlocutors (with their knowledge of and permission for my use of the images in my dissertation) using a modified version of the photovoice methodology as a participatory photograph project, which is explained below in more detail.

Multiple methods for collecting data have been selected because triangulation of information on topics from different sources is critical to the validity and reliability of ethnographic research (LeCompte and Schensul 2010:192-193). The following methodologies were employed in this study:

Archival Research: I attempted to access original documents, written in Spanish by missionaries, nuns, and government officials, that would provide a deep historical context in which to analyze gendered labor in Otavalan craft production. However, accessing the archives listed in my research proposal proved more difficult than anticipated, despite my efforts to utilize professionals in my network to gain access to their documents. As a result, I instead consulted a number of valuable secondary historical sources written in Spanish, rather than original documents, which were

unavailable to me in various archives. I found relevant literature that I was able to add to my bibliography at Casa de la Juventud in Otavalo, Museo y Centro Cultural del Ministerio de Cultura de Ecuador in Ibarra, the Casa de Cultura in Ibarra, and the personal library of a well-known Ecuadorian academic in the Otavalo region, all of which I visited throughout the first few months of my fieldwork.

These historical sources provided insight on how *obrajes* shaped modern gendered labor in craft production, as well as a temporal comparison through which to understand changes to contemporary gendered labor in craft production and distribution. Analyzing archival documents to provide an historical overview of the transformation in the gender roles as the result of Spanish *obraje* production system, and utilizing participant observation and interviews to assess how global pressures and the contemporary push to commodify ethnicity resulted in a better understanding of contemporary gender relations.

Participant Observation: I was engaged in participant observation in homes, production sites (typically located in a part of the home), and the Plaza de Ponchos market. This method allowed me to take part in and experience the daily lives of research participants. From previous research trips, I already knew several Otavalan families, who were willing to connect me with other interlocutors. In this manner, I was able to quickly expand my network by using snowball sampling; in other words, as each new interlocutor introduced me to his/her family, friends, and acquaintances, my pool of participants expanded exponentially (Schensul and LeCompte 2013; LeCompte and Schensul 2010; Bernard 2011). I also intentionally cultivated other research interlocutors from the Plaza de Ponchos market and other interactions so my interlocutors would be more representative and not belong to the same extended family networks (including via kinship and godparent relationships).

In 2018, I lived with a middle-class mestizo family. My host parents were well-known and respected academics, who provided me with literature, introductions to archaeologists from around the world as well as interview participants, attempted to facilitate access to archives that had been closed, and opportunities to visit archaeological sites in the region. Through their network of indigenous and mestizo Ecuadorian contacts, I learned about locals' perceptions of indigenous people and saw how deeply ingrained

racism and classism are, even among highly educated mestizos and well-off indigenous people who lamented the racism, classism, and sexism in their country, often without reflecting on how they had internalized those very ideas (making me reflect critically on my own positionality and perspectives) (influenced by Alcalde 2022 and Grosfoguel et al. 2015). Because of where I was located, I was able to conduct interviews and have informal conversations with a broad range of Ecuadorians, Colombians, Venezuelans, and Americans.

Although I was based out of a mestizo household, I spent several days and nights at the homes of indigenous research interlocutors. There, I cooked, ate, worked in the fields, and made crafts alongside my interlocutors, always observing, participating, learning, and talking. By living and working with a family, I gained experiential knowledge, while learning from conversations in the home, production site, and market. Living with a family that I already knew and that had already accepted me allowed me to learn from others using the vantage point of being integrated into an Otavalan family and provided me with access to events as though I were a family member (ex: three weddings, one *perdida de mano* [an engagement party], and three visits to the indigenous cemetery, one of which was on *día de los difuntos* [Day of the Dead]). Moving among several Otavalan families provided me with a comparative understanding of life for indigenous and mestizo Otavalans.

Ethnographic Interviews: In addition to informal conversations, I conducted unstructured interviews, which are informal and allow participants to talk freely, as well as semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to ask general questions in order to obtain data on similar topics that were later analyzed for overlap in order to determine what ideas and practices may or may not be representative of Otavalan craft producers and vendors (Schensul and LeCompte 2013; LeCompte and Schensul 2010; Bernard 2011). Because I lived and worked with families for nine months that built on previous primary research, strong relationships with my interlocutors offset the need for more formal or structured interviews.

I conducted twenty-two interviews, of which six were joint interviews, as family members tend to work and spend the majority of their time together. For the Interview

Guide, see the Appendix. These interviews were completed with representatives from nine extended families, including eighteen women and four men.

Men were less likely to agree to complete interviews; their family members always convinced them to participate by “helping them” [the woman who had agreed to the interview] or by “helping me, their friend” [phrases repeated by multiple participants; translated by the author]. Once the men agreed, however, they always dominated the conversation. Two of the men I interviewed, as well as two men I did not interview but who attempted to “participate” during another interview I was conducting, had a different view of what an interview should be. They did not want to answer my questions but instead to tell me about what they thought was important and move on. They discussed what they knew of the history of crafts among Otavalans and other famous craft producers from Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru; they discussed production techniques and how they felt pride as craft producers; they discussed the uniqueness of the Plaza de Ponchos market, often in relation to markets in Quito; and they discussed the importance of quality (materials and products, usually arguing that others will buy and sell lower quality crafts, which is detrimental to the future of Otavalan crafts).

This limited number of interviews conducted with men provided me with an additional breadth of perspectives, especially as they approached these interviews as an opportunity to educate me about what they thought was important for me to know, rather than responding to my prepared questions. They even framed our exchange in terms of them having “helped me” and “educated me” [translated by author]. Perhaps this was because I did not know the men as well as the women, so they did not know as much about my research focus. The men seemed to think I was in Ecuador because I knew nothing about craft production, while the women understood from my explanation and conversations that I had prepared before my trip by reading extensively. The interviews with men provided me with a breadth of information and different perspectives on craft production that was informative, if not comparable to the standardized questions from my Interview Guide that I used for the other ethnographic interviews. Although four men of twenty-two interviews is not a statistically significant sample from which to draw conclusions, it was an interesting exercise in how men and women interacted and communicated with me quite differently.

Several interviewees felt more comfortable responding when they could consult with a family member. When possible, interviews were completed in the home for fewer distractions. However, most preferred to complete the interviews in the market to fill time on slower days, since this was where they spent the majority of their time. Although this made scheduling and completing the interviews more challenging for me, it put my research interlocutors more at ease and made better use of their time, which I was conscious of not wanting to disrespect. I found that many of the women I interviewed were uncomfortable with the interview process. Some were concerned about being seen as authorities on their culture and opted for a joint interview to ease the feeling that they were responsible for conclusive or representative responses. Others began the interview process shyly but became more comfortable throughout the interview, once they gained a sense of the style of questions, which is common with interviews. Still others verbally agreed to complete an interview but postponed until it was impossible to complete the interview, signaling their hesitance.

I discussed this wariness toward interviews with Daniela. An acquaintance more than a research interlocutor, I met her on the public bus during our commutes and we began a friendship. She is an indigenous Otavaleño who translates texts in Atuntaqui for the Jehovah's Witnesses. She is very religious and not involved in craft production or distribution, but she is knowledgeable and introspective on her culture. Because of her work as a Jehovah's Witness, she has conducted short verbal surveys with indigenous Otavalans, and has also experienced people she knew well and with whom she had had numerous discussions become reluctant to respond to questionnaires. She hypothesized the reluctance to participate in questionnaires and interviews was based in a fear to be singled out as an authority and a fear that their responses would be misrepresented or used against them, their family, and/or their community. As a result, I attempted to put participants at ease by chatting with them informally before beginning the interviews, encouraging joint interviews, and putting them in charge of the pacing, opting to pause the interview whenever they wanted. Because of these strategies, those who overheard interviews or spoke with other interview participants were more willing to agree to an interview. Likewise, I think this explains why some respondents became more comfortable throughout the process.

All respondents provided consent, so all interviews were recorded. During the interview, I took notes by hand. Strategic transcriptions occurred while in the field. Detailed transcriptions of interviews were completed after returning from the field.

Family Histories: I collected family histories because they serve as a tool to chart not only familial relationships – which is useful in a cultural context where kinship networks are heavily utilized, fictive kinship is common, and godparent relationships are valuable – but also as a means to inquire about the intergenerational transmission of knowledge regarding craft production and distribution. By conducting family histories, I gained long-term knowledge about gendered labor, market strategies, and knowledge transmission within families that I then compared to data from other families. When possible, I collected family histories from two to three family members to verify information from multiple sources, fill in missing information, and make strategic use of time. When analyzed in conjunction with archival data and the existing body of literature, family histories provided insight into the origin of current gendered labor expectations and potential moments of change in gender expectations regarding craft production and distribution.

I completed nine family histories with eight women and one man, representing six extended families. All respondents provided consent, so all family histories were recorded. During the family histories, I took notes by hand. Detailed transcriptions of family histories were completed after returning from the field. For the Family Histories Guide, see the Appendix.

Research interlocutors always spoke about their families in informal conversations, so I was surprised that several interlocutors seemed hesitant to complete a family history. This was even more surprising to me since the family histories were faster to complete than the ethnographic interviews. Perhaps, like the ethnographic interviews, research interlocutors were hesitant because I used a written guide and recorded the discussion. I suspect in hindsight that some were concerned that revealing information on the size of their families or the age when family members stopped formal education to work (usually in craft production and distribution) might result in some criticism of their culture because respondents proudly pointed out that their children were different from previous generations (less poverty, longer and more adequate education, more career

opportunities), but the general problematic history of white U.S. researchers in the Andes, especially with indigenous residents, is also a context to keep in mind. Still, everyone who participated in a family history discussion remarked afterward that it was not difficult, they were pleased that it was not a major time commitment, and that they enjoyed describing their family.

Modified Photovoice: Participatory photography asks research interlocutors to take a more active role in the research project by taking, discussing, and sharing photos to “reposition participants as co-producers of knowledge and potentially as co-researchers” (Gubrium and Harper 2013:13). I asked community members to take photos of craft production and distribution, describe their importance, and discuss the ways in which these tasks are gendered and why. Photovoice methodology “recognizes that such people often have an expertise and insight into their own communities and worlds that professionals and outsiders lack” and allows for greater collaboration between participants and researchers (Wang and Burris 1997:370). Participatory photography is especially significant among illiterate and disenfranchised populations, as it encourages increased collaboration in an effort to gain more data while decolonizing knowledge (Gubrium and Harper 2013:70). In photovoice, the photos are not separated from the photographers to tell their stories. I modified this methodology to allow me to collate photographs around similar themes to share their various perspectives. This methodology provided more agency to Otavalan collaborators by asking them to show me what they thought was important and gave them another avenue through which to make their voices heard, especially during moments when I was not physically present, as I could not be with every participant for every moment.

I had seven interlocutors participate in the modified photovoice methodology. Two were a mother-daughter pair who did so jointly and another two were a husband-wife dyad who also did so jointly. Although each participant was meant to keep the digital camera I provided for a seven-day period, several kept the camera for longer either because they wanted to photograph things over the coming days or because they forgot to return it. Recruiting participants proved more difficult than anticipated, but I was pleased with the methodology because it provided me with multiple points of view, served as visual aids to stimulate discussion, and provided meaningful gifts for participants.

Several interlocutors agreed to participate, but then postponed when they would take the camera or backed out altogether. Some interlocutors were uncomfortable with the technology (although it was a basic digital camera, and many were already comfortable using smart phones). Of those, some said no outright, and others wanted to wait until their children could help them, which did not happen. Other research interlocutors were uncomfortable being the arbiters of what was important in textile production and distribution.

For those who participated in modified photovoice, they seemed excited it was something they could do to help my research on their own time. They were also proud to take a more active role in my research, have their voices heard, and have the opportunity to show off their homes and families in the photos. They opted to include photos of food production, religious events, and family events, rather than strictly focusing on crafts because they felt it was an opportunity to show what is important to them and to their culture. Most participants did not seem to feel the pressure to be experts that some interview and family history respondents felt because those who agreed to participate in photovoice felt comfortable taking photos with a digital camera and thought the images could mostly speak for themselves. It was typically younger participants who were excited to be involved with modified photovoice. The technology appeared to entice some and deter others, but I think the methodology was ultimately successful.

I explained how I intended to use modified photovoice and what I needed from my interlocutors in this way: Me gustaría tener su ayuda con mis investigaciones. Traje una cámara para compartir con la comunidad y puedo enseñarle cómo usarla. Me gustaría que tomara fotos de la producción y venta de artesanías, para que pueda mostrarme lo que es importante. Si acepta hacer esto, le prestaré la cámara por una semana. Puede tomar tantas fotografías en su casa, fábrica o mercado como piensa ser necesario. Después, revisaremos las fotos juntas. Podemos hablar sobre por qué las tomó y qué significan. Luego, puede seleccionar las que cree que son las mejores. Puedo usarlas en mi tesis o presentaciones en mis investigaciones. Si lo desea, imprimiré copias de las fotos que le muestren a usted, a su trabajo o a su familia (si dan permiso) que le puede dar como agradecimiento por ayudar con mis investigaciones. ¿Tiene algunas preguntas?

[I would like your help with my research. I brought a camera for the community to share, and I can teach you how to use it. I would like you to take photos of craft production and selling, so you can show me what is important. If you agree to do this, I will lend you the camera for a week. You can take as many photos in your home, factory, and/or market as you think are necessary. Afterward, we will go through the photos together. We can talk about why you took them and what they mean. Then, you can select the ones you think are the best. I may use them in my dissertation or presentations on my research. If you would like, I will print copies of the photos showing you, your work, or your family (as long as they give permission) that you may keep as a thank you for helping with my research. Do you have any questions?]

1.5 “The Field”

Fieldwork is conducted wherever an anthropologist deems appropriate, meaning that research can be done at home or abroad (Bernard 2011). “The field is a physical setting, the boundaries of which are defined by the researcher in terms of institutions and people of interest, and their associated activities in geographic space” (Schensul and LeCompte 2013:23). Important in this explanation is the notion that the researcher defines the field, so work can be done at home or abroad, in businesses or in villages, etc. They continue: “When we state that ethnographic researchers go to the ‘field,’ we mean that they move from their own communities, institutional settings, and familiar behavioral and cognitive patterns to ‘enter’ another social world – the world in which the research is to be conducted” (Schensul and LeCompte 2013:23). In this sense, ‘going into the field’ is as much about one’s approach, state of mind, and posturing as it is about the physical location where research will be conducted. ‘Going into the field’ means that researchers must be analytical and critical of what they systematically observe; they must ask questions and probe for deeper responses; they must shift their behavior to be appropriate. As the adage goes, they must strive to make the familiar unfamiliar and the unfamiliar familiar.

For my research, ‘going into the field’ meant spending time in people’s homes and production sites in Peguche and in the Plaza de Ponchos market in Otavalo. I worked alongside my research interlocutors, making handicrafts, cooking, attending weddings,

visiting the cemetery, working in the field. I was always learning by observing, participating, listening, and questioning. 'Going into the field' also meant visiting archives and libraries. I spent time with mestizos and indigenous Otavalans alike, often accepting their invitations to events I might not have attended otherwise.

1.5.1 Positionality

When speaking of positionality, we are asked to reflect on how gender, race, class, and other forms of marking identity are positioned in relation to one another, rather than inherently having leveling qualities (ex: positionality writes against notions of 'all women' as being the same) (Alcoff 1988). Not only do we mean one's position in society, but also the power dynamics surrounding that social status. My own positionality is that of a young white woman from a single-parent middle class family, who has received a liberal arts education in the U.S. I live in a small town in the Appalachian Mountains of rural western Pennsylvania, and I have found that there are similarities in interactions among small mountain towns, whether they are located in the U.S. or in Ecuador. As such, I have biases, but it is my positionality that has led me to my research interests and provided me with an understanding of Otavalan reality as a small town in the Andes Mountains.

As an outsider conducting research in Otavalo, I inherently have some advantages and disadvantages. As someone who grew up in the U.S., my preconceived notions about Otavaleños are limited to the literature I have read and my past interactions with Otavalans. Because I did not grow up in Ecuador, I have not been socialized with messages about who Otavalans are or how they should be viewed or treated. I view this as an advantage because it allows my research to be shaped by interactions, rather than state-sponsored messages or even colloquial ideas about Otavalans. Further, as an outsider, I could claim ignorance (which I sometimes did) about mundane things, which provided me with great opportunities to ask questions about things that Ecuadorians or Otavalans might take for granted. Even if the majority of the time, these questions proved to not be incredibly insightful, there were also instances in which I could learn a great deal. As anthropologists, we are trained to probe beyond those initial responses ("that's

how we've always done it," or "that's just the way it is," or even "it's tradition") to find deeper meaning and understanding.

As a non-Ecuadorian, I was not perceived as having the same legacy of colonialism and subjugation as a white or mestizo Ecuadorian doing the same research. Obviously, this would be different if an indigenous Otavalan were doing the research, but they might be treated differently due to the economic and education level required to do this kind of work. That is not to say that the U.S. has not had a long and often problematic involvement with Ecuadorian politics and economics in particular, but it is a different relationship. Since racism and classism are still major issues in Ecuador, indigenous Otavalans can interact with non-Ecuadorians differently than they can with other Ecuadorians who have been raised in a system that inherently views indigenous populations as less than. My being from the U.S., however, and my whiteness, situated me in power relations I could not always see, and no doubt shaped many of my interactions and forms of access since I could claim both the statuses of researcher and international tourist.

1.5.2 Visa Issues and the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis

During the course of my research, Ecuador changed their rules regarding visas, but the changes were unclear and not made widely known. Initially navigating these changes in 2018 led to a one-month delay in the commencement of my fieldwork. Visa regulations were constantly in flux during my fieldwork. My contacts in Ecuador attempted to help me navigate the process, but locals and even government officials were unsure of the rules and how they applied to different parties (ex: an American academic or a Venezuelan refugee). This state of flux and confusion made it very difficult to navigate the visa process while also conducting fieldwork. Because of this, I needed to apply for a visa (*Visitante Temporal – Visa especial de turismo otros países* or Temporary Visitor - Special tourist visa for other countries [outside of UNASUR, The Union of South American Nations]) to complete my fieldwork – while I was in the field, already in the midst of conducting fieldwork. Although I have been fortunate to travel to several countries, my privilege as an American had previously allowed me to travel without a visa, so I had never experienced the agonizing bureaucratic process one must

endure to be considered “legal.” Through this experience, my understanding of immigration changed as I realized firsthand how many immigrants are disadvantaged by the process. My circumstances were different than the immigrants I encountered. I had the privilege of being an American, completing the academic exercise of doctoral research, and I had a social network established in Otavalo. Meanwhile, the immigrants I encountered were fleeing various forms of violence. I had a safe home to live in; Venezuelan refugees were homeless. Clearly, our circumstances differed, as did our relationship with the bureaucratic process of obtaining a visa. However, my training as an anthropologist and my firsthand experiences helped me empathize not just with the immigrants I spoke and interacted with, but also with those who immigrate to the U.S.

The process of applying for an obtaining the correct visa took several trips to various cities across the span of two months. For months, it seemed as though I would have to leave Ecuador early and not return until the following year, which would impact my plans for fieldwork, dissertation writing, graduation, and employment. Along the way, I met scores of foreigners trying to navigate the confusing visa application process. I saw firsthand how the political-economic crisis in Venezuela had resulted in a humanitarian crisis in Ecuador, with several provinces declaring a state of emergency as they tried to cope with the thousands of Venezuelans who were flooding across the border on a daily basis. Ecuadorian citizens’ responses ranged from the desire to help Venezuelans to concern about how the country could accommodate the numbers to outrage at foreigners “stealing their jobs.” Those responses were not unlike many white U.S. citizens’ responses to Latin American immigrants entering the U.S. at the same time (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017).

In addition to seeing Venezuelan refugees living on the streets, holding signs in search of work, and selling whatever small items they could manage (candy, cleaning products, bracelets, etc.), I spent hours in line at government sites (for the visa process) with Venezuelans only days after the failed assassination attempt of Venezuelan President Maduro. President Maduro succeeded Hugo Chavez in 2013, but his presidency has been contested since 2018 due to his political and economic policies. Although the Venezuelan refugees I encountered did not agree that assassination was the correct approach, they acknowledged that had it been successful, they would be at home instead

of navigating the lengthy process of obtaining a visa in a foreign country. The situation was heartbreaking and one I would not have experienced so poignantly had I not gone through the visa process alongside them. My own positionality was certainly different: I could return home to my country without fear of persecution and could likely obtain employment while I waited for visa approval, which was unlikely for the Venezuelan refugees I encountered. My visa experience was personally stressful, but more importantly, it provided insight into my privileged positionality and the trauma of Venezuelan refugees that is ultimately a story of resilience.

Although poverty has always existed in Ecuador, it has never been so prevalent a topic in my informal discussions with indigenous Otavaleños who independently brought up poverty as a concern for the future of Ecuador. Several of my collaborators expressed an interest in what causes poverty, what causes people to remain in poverty, and what solutions might exist to eradicate poverty. Some believed that other locations (for example, Cuenca, a city in southern Ecuador) may provide a model for other Ecuadorians to follow. Those who held that position tended to believe that poverty is the result of individual choices and responsibilities and, therefore, it is up to individuals to change their behavior and thus economic situation. Others believed that the government was failing them, and that the economic system was to blame. Many of those holding that view believed one possible solution would be to temporarily close the borders in an effort to cope with the number of foreigners (especially Venezuelans and Colombians) currently in Ecuador in terms of food, jobs, and shelter. Many people referred to Venezuelans as a problem, specifically the number of Venezuelans living in/entering Ecuador, as well as the belief that the majority of Venezuelans in Ecuador were thieves who stole when they could not find work. They would often cite particular incidents from the news, especially those involving murder as the result of armed robbery. Thus, my own experiences obtaining a visa as well as the ongoing Venezuelan refugee crisis and ideas about immigration became unanticipated avenues of research.

1.5.3 Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized to provide theoretical and literature-based background information before presenting and analyzing ethnographic findings. Chapter

2 describes the research sites of Otavalo and Peguche in the Andes Mountains of Ecuador. In this chapter, I argue that a historical perspective of this region and its peoples provides the foundation for understanding current relations to crafts, especially with regard to gendered labor.

Chapter 3 explores views on indigeneity, gender, and identity, including those held by local mestizos, local indigenous people, and by foreigners, as well as how indigenous Otavalans navigate these various perspectives. Indigenous peoples are often viewed as unchanging relics, which is a limiting perspective. The Ecuadorian state has promoted a view of Otavalans as “model Indians,” which it uses to promote tourism to the region. Otavalans must navigate these varied views in their social interactions. The chapter also provides a basis to explore how Otavalan women are multiply marginalized through their gender, cultural and national citizenship, and indigeneity, a theme that runs through the rest of the dissertation.

Previous ethnographies of Otavalo have focused predominantly on male weavers, since they are often the producers of the textiles for which Otavalans have been famous for centuries. I build on these earlier works by describing men’s recent work in machinated hand weaving (Chapter 3) but go beyond a focus on male weavers to spotlight women’s involvement in crafts, both in production and vending (Chapter 5). This approach was shaped by Otavalans, who described their relationship with crafts in a holistic perspective during our conversations, rather than separating production and vending. Gender relations shape the entire arc of the dissertation, with Chapter 4 focusing on gender relations in the household, Chapter 5 highlighting gendered labor in the market, and Chapter 6 addressing gender relations with new immigrants to public spaces.

Chapter 4 analyzes different systems of valorization of crafts, noting that different types of consumers from foreign cultures usually have different systems of valorization for the crafts they purchase compared to indigenous producer-vendors and vendors. Otavalan vendors navigate these different systems of valorization when they interact with consumers, who simultaneously want to purchase an item and an experience.

In Chapter 5, I explore the commodification of indigenous female identities alongside and through the crafts they are vending. For example, a quintessential Otavalan design is the “*chismosas*,” or “the gossipers,” which depicts a group of Otavalan women.

This motif is so popular with tourists that producers continually find new products in which to include the *chismosas*. Otavalan women visibly perform their identity in the market by dressing *de anaco* (the local name for Otavalan women's indigenous dress, which takes its name from the word "anaco," which is the word for the skirt) and producing portable handmade crafts, like crocheted masks. This chapter highlights the agency of Otavalan women as they navigate craft work and strategize their presentation of self in relation to their identity and its commodification.

Chapter 6 explores the political ecology of craft production in relation to (stereotyped) expectations about indigenous peoples as stewards of nature; these expectations of sustainability reward mestizo artisans as eco-warrior innovators for adopting practices indigenous producers have abandoned in order to meet higher consumer demand. The influx of Venezuelan refugees further exacerbated inter-ethnic relations in regard to use of public space for vending in the informal market sector. Thus, the political ecology of craft production is intimately linked to inter-ethnic power dynamics and social status. Further, this chapter investigates the tension between authenticity and innovation that Otavalan producer-vendors must navigate. As indigenous people, Otavalans are expected to be living vessels of authenticity through their beliefs, dress, production techniques, and other behaviors. Of course, this stereotype is limiting and unrealistic, so Otavalans actively reimagine authenticity through creative means to continue their relationship with a craft-based livelihood. Yet, these strategies are challenged by a young generation of Otavalans whose aspirations are for careers outside of craft work. The changing market conditions highlighted in this chapter create ongoing challenges for Otavalan women to navigate their craft work and identity.

Chapter 7 summarizes the main findings and the contributions of this research. It also explores the ongoing challenges Otavaleños are facing, including some which have arisen during or after fieldwork, like the Venezuelan refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, global climate change, and changing generational aspirations, as we look to the future for Otavalan livelihoods and relations to crafts.

CHAPTER 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH CRAFTS

2.1 Geography and People of Contemporary Otavalo and Peguche



Map of Ecuador drawn by Stephen Holland.

Figure 2.1 Map of Ecuador (Whitten 2003:21)

Located on the western side of South America, the equator passes through Ecuador, for which the state is named. Ecuador is a relatively small state, 275,830 km², roughly the area of Oregon (Wilkie et al. 2002:75). Perhaps the most famous town in Ecuador is Otavalo, known worldwide for its handicraft market, the Plaza de Ponchos (officially named the Plaza Centenario) (See Figure 2.2). Otavalo is located in the province of Imbabura, 110 km (68.4 mi) north of Quito, the capital of Ecuador, and 150 km (90 mi) south of the Colombian border (See Figure 2.1). It is this proximity to the Colombian border that has allowed for high numbers of Colombian and, more recently, Venezuelan immigrants into the area. Otavalo's location has also long been beneficial for trade and commerce.



Figure 2.2 Map of the streets of Otavalo, showing the famous market, the Plaza de Ponchos (Street Map of Otavalo 2013).

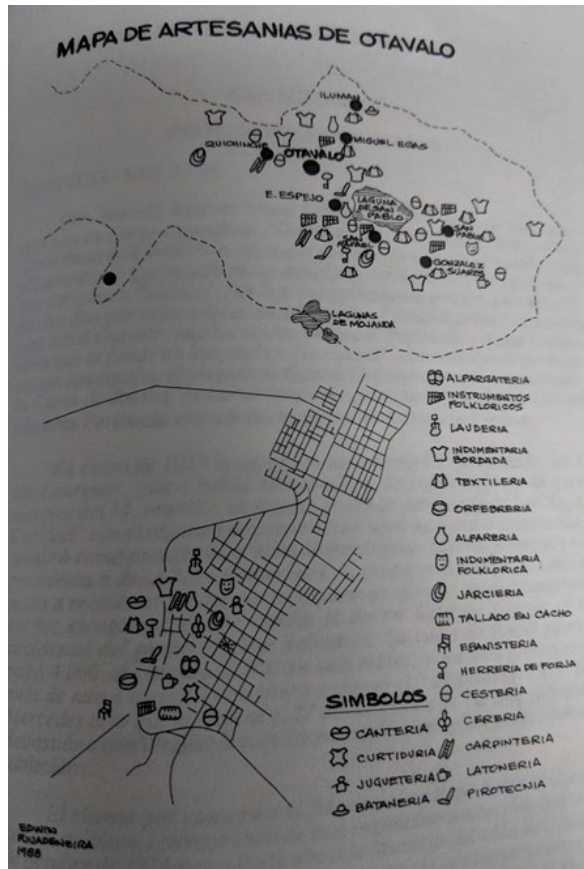


Figure 2.3 Map of where various handicrafts are made and sold in the area around Otavalo. The village commonly called “Peguiche” is listed under its official name of “Miguel Egas” (San Félix 1988:105).

Although commonly called Otavalo by locals and foreigners alike, the town’s official name is San Luis de Otavalo. It is located in the Imbabura Valley in the northern Andes Mountains. The Andes Mountains are locally called the Sierra or highlands region and run down the center of Ecuador, dividing the coastal region (“*la costa*”) and the Amazon (locally called “*el oriente*”). Otavalo is situated in the middle of two cordilleras, or mountain chains. Mountains and volcanos are designated as either male or female and thought to have certain personalities and sometimes even supernatural properties. Taita (Father) Imbabura (4,557 m or 14,952 ft above sea level) is located to the east of Otavalo and Mama (Mother) Cotacachi (4,936 m or 16,195 ft above sea level) is located to the west. The altitude ranges from 1,100 meters (3,608.9 ft) above sea level in the valley to 4,700 meters (15,420 ft) above sea level in the surroundings Andes Mountains (Situación geográfica). The altitude negates the heat one might associate with the equator, giving

Otavalo a mild climate “invariably described as ‘spring-like’” (Meisch 2002:11). The average temperature in Otavalo is 14 degrees Celsius (57 degrees Fahrenheit) (Situación geográfica). The climate as well as the hours of daylight vary mildly annually.

The town of San Luis de Otavalo is the capital of the *cantón* (or canton in English) of Otavalo, which includes an area larger than the town and encompasses Peguche. Ecuador is divided into political regions of provinces, which are subdivided into cantons. As of 2001, the town of San Luis de Otavalo had a population of approximately 26,000 people (Meisch 2002:10); according to Ecuador’s 2010 census, the *cantón* of Otavalo had a population of 104,874 (Instituto Nacional). The area of the *cantón* is 507.47 km² (195.94 mi²) (Situación geográfica).

There are several small communities in the Imbabura Valley, populated by *indígenas* or indigenous people (known collectively as the Otavalo, Otavalans, or Otavaleños), in addition to mestizos, or people of mixed race, and whites. As of 2000, Ecuador had a population of approximately 12.65 million (Wilkie et al. 2002:154). Estimates of Ecuador’s indigenous population have varied anywhere from 30-50% in the mid-late twentieth century (Martínez Novo 2017:127). For example, one study estimated that approximately 30% of the population was indigenous as of 1980 (Wilkie et al. 2002:171). However, when the Ecuadorian census implemented ethnic categories with self-identification, the 2001 census registered 6.83% of Ecuadorians as indigenous, and the 2010 census documented 7% of the population as indigenous (Martínez Novo 2017:127). The shift in census data is related to a shift in how indigeneity is perceived in Ecuador due to the influence of neoliberal perspectives about race, which contrast with previous ideas in Ecuador about ethnicity (Martínez Novo 2017:131). Martínez Novo argues this effort to reduce the reported numbers of indigenous populations in Ecuador has been strategically implemented by indigenous people who benefit from obfuscating their true numbers to minimize targets for the state and by the state who benefit from reporting lower numbers to argue that Ecuador is multicultural – emphasizing other ethnic groups – and to minimize the impacts of the indigenous movement (Martínez Novo 2015, 2017). Despite the more recent data indicating a lower percentage of Ecuadorians who self-identify as indigenous, the impact of indigenous populations remains significant due to the indigenous movement in Ecuador and a diaspora of

indigenous peoples resulting in large transnational indigenous communities living outside of Ecuador (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Kyle 1999, Kyle 2000).

Indigenous Otavalans residing in Ecuador often live in small communities surrounding the town of Otavalo, such as Peguche (officially Dr. Miguel Egas Cabezas), Ilumán (officially San Juan de Ilumán), and Quichinche (officially San José de Quichinche). Those who produce handicrafts typically do so at their homes in these smaller communities, each of which is famous for producing a different type of handicraft (See Figure 3.3). For instance, Peguche and Ilumán are known for textile production.

2.2 Brief History of Otavalo and Peguche

In order to understand the political economy of crafts, a brief discussion of history and politics in Ecuador is relevant. The Imbabura Valley originally consisted of various indigenous groups; Cochasquí and Caranquis/Karankis are recognized as inhabiting this region as far back as 1200 A.D. (although accounts differ on date ranges). These indigenous groups were not centrally organized, which helped them resist Inca advances that began in the late 1400s. Eventually, however, they fell to the Inca empire. At the end of the late fifteenth century (in the 1490s), the Inca conquered these indigenous people of the Imbabura Valley and attempted to make them into a single indigenous group that would become part of the Inca system. It was under Inca rule that the various polities were homogenized, identifying as a single group that exists today. Only fifty years later, the Spanish arrived and, once again, the area was conquered by 1535. Since Otavalans were incorporated into the Inca Empire, the transition to Spanish rule was swift.

There is a long history of anthropological research being conducted in Otavalo and the surrounding areas, focused on crafts, the market, music, and food. One of the earliest and most influential works is *The Awakening Valley* by John Collier, Jr. and Aníbal Buitron (1949), which discusses the history and social status of indigenous people in Ecuador, especially the market, textiles, and culture of Otavaleños in the Imbabura Valley. Another early and influential monograph is Elsie Clews Parsons' *Peuchecanton of Otavalo, Province of Imbabura Ecuador* (1945) (alternatively published as *Peguche, Canton of Otavalo, Province of Imbabura Ecuador*). This text relies on Rosa Lema, an

indigenous Otavalan woman from Peguche, as a key informant, and almost exclusively uses her insights to make generalizations about material culture, religion and rituals, and family life of indigenous Otavalans. These early works have inspired numerous authors to study the textiles, economies, and traditions of Otavaleños. From the 1980s to the early 2000s, Frank Salomon wrote numerous articles, chapters, and books on Otavalo, discussing shamanism, the Incan influence, textiles, weaving, and gender. Ethnographies by Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999), Lynn Meisch (2002), and Mercedes Prieto (2010; 2011) have provided an invaluable foundation for this dissertation project.

2.3 Indigenous Craft Production in a History of Economic Engagement

Otavaleños have a long history of engagement with the global market. As early as the sixteenth century, it was noted that “Otavalos were producing not only traditional textiles but nontraditional textiles for outsiders, a pattern which still obtains” (Meisch 2002:21). It is important to note that Otavalans have a long history of textiles as a form of syncretism: where they incorporate designs, materials, and production techniques into their textiles – especially those made for non-indigenous, non-locals. Meisch describes this type of production as a paradox: “For 450 years it has been traditional for Otavalos to make nontraditional cloth” (2002: 21).

Because of their tremendous skills at weaving, Otavalans have long been recognized as artisans (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:17). In addition to producing textiles, Otavaleños have a long history of selling their handicrafts both in the local market and outside of the Otavalan region. Building on Salomon’s (1986) work, Colloredo-Mansfeld describes “a class of full-time, long-distance trade specialists known as *mindaláes*,” who would travel to sell Otavalan handicrafts, dating to the sixteenth century (1999:122). *Mindaláes* are important in highlighting Otavaleños’ historical engagement with economies outside of the Imbabura Valley. This kind of long-distance exchange was prioritized enough to develop a social class of traders by the 1500s, so it is possible to infer that long-distance trade was occurring on some scale prior to the 16th century. Therefore, Otavalans have been weavers who produce cloth for both internal and external markets and travel to sell their textiles for at least the past five hundred years. Thus, contemporary Otavalans pride themselves on their legacy of craft production and

distribution without a reliance on middlemen or foreign traders. This legacy of craft production was coopted by the Spanish, who implemented the system of *obrajes*, which has shaped the organization of crafting producing labor to this day.

Meisch describes how all of this contributes to the modern Otavalan culture:

The Otavalo experience must be seen against a background of pre-Inca traveling merchants [*mindaláes*], forced labor in Spanish colonial *obrajes* (Sp. [Spanish for] textile sweatshops), and later *wasipungu* (Q. [Quichua for a system of debt labor, referring to both *obrajes* and *haciendas*]), debt serfdom involving extensive work for an *hacienda* (Sp. large farm or ranch) in exchange for the right to farm a small plot (2002:3).

The hacienda system has been studied and described so extensively that most people are familiar with this form of forced agricultural labor (Lyons 2006), but many are unfamiliar with the system of *obrajes* (for more on *obrajes*, see Phelan 1967; Borchart de Moreno 1995; Graubart 2000), which I argue have shaped gendered labor in the contemporary production and distribution system.

2.3.1 *Obrajes*: Textile Sweatshops of South America

When the Spanish conquered the indigenous polities of the New World, they imposed the system of *obrajes* on the native people with brute force (Korovkin 1998:127). The *obraje* system has been described in the literature in a manner that varies from neutral to negative. Salomon defines an *obraje* merely as a “textile plant” (1983:423); Meisch takes a much harder line, calling it a “textile sweatshop” (2002:3), following Phelan’s famous admonition that it was “the sweatshop of South America” (1967:66). This dissertation adopts the latter stance because indigenous people were forced into this labor system and often mistreated while forced to meet labor and production quotas for the Spanish crown. Hundreds of years later, indigenous Otavalans spoke to me about this painful period in history by describing the brutal conditions their ancestors were forced into.

Because certain communities had a history of weaving before European contact, they were chosen to weave garments for Spanish royalty in *obrajes*; their textiles were also sold in Latin American countries, such as Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, and Colombia (Meisch 2002; Kyle 1999; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:13). Under the *obraje*

system, the Spanish forced indigenous males into fulfilling required periods of manual labor, weaving textiles such as ponchos, shawls, and raw fabric in colonial “sweatshops” (Phelan 1967:66). Men were required to fulfill labor quotas because the Spanish assumed indigenous men were the heads of the households in which they lived; this was not the indigenous perspective prior to colonization, but the *obraje* system has shifted indigenous Otavalan ideas about gender, which I discuss further below.

The Spanish *obraje* system stripped indigenous peoples of their rights and upended modes of livelihood by implementing new labor expectations: “With the coming of colonialism, indigenous women and men became economic wards of the state. [...] Although men were more likely to be subject to colonial labor drafts, leaving women to fend for their families (Stark 1979), both women and men were forced to work for the conquerors without regard for their own families’ agricultural consumption needs” (Hamilton 1998:23). There were numerous *obrajes* throughout Ecuador and Peru that housed large numbers of indigenous workers, although estimates of those numbers vary (Salomon 1981:439). Although the labor quota was intended for men, there are records of women and children working in *obrajes* in order to fulfill their family’s obligations (Graubart 2000:561). Unfortunately, many of the documents are more concerned with the textiles than the workers, so labor records are incomplete.

As was often the case during colonialism, the highest quality textiles from the *obrajes* were sent back to Spain as tribute, in order to offset the fact that Ecuador possessed virtually no other material riches desired by the Crown. While nearly all *obrajes* were initially run by Spaniards, some indigenous people served as overseers and eventually even ran their own *obrajes*, forcing other indigenous people from their own community to work for them (Borchart de Moreno 1995:14). In these indigenous-run *obrajes*, however, workers were more likely to be paid. Although these were considered by the Spanish Crown to be illegitimate and did not count toward fulfilling one’s labor quota, they did provide some indigenous men with an opportunity to make money to support their families (Borchart de Moreno 1995:14). They also provided a safer space in which to learn the new technologies and materials imported by the Spanish, which could then be implemented in household production settings.

2.3.1.1 Gendered Labor in *Obraje* Production

I argue that current gendered labor relations in textile production can be understood as a result of *obrajes*. The *obrajes* consisted of mostly male workers since only males were forced by the Spanish to complete mandatory labor requirements because the Spanish viewed men as the heads of households/representatives of families. However, there is record of women working to spin the wool into thread in Peruvian *obrajes*, so it is possible that the situation in Ecuador was similar (Graubart 2000:561). In fact, many historical documents treat the modern states of Peru and Ecuador as a single entity because Ecuador was a Real Audiencia dependent on the Viceroyalty of Peru; so, it is difficult to trace contemporary geographical differences (Salomon 1981).

The implementation of *obrajes* and the Spanish technology that came with them actually catalyzed a unique change in gendered labor. Previously, “spinning and weaving on a backstrap loom were considered ‘female’ tasks” (Graubart 2000:554). Yet, the Spanish tradition was for males to weave on floor looms; this, combined with the mandatory work periods, seems to have led to men becoming the weavers in Otavalan society (Graubart 2000:554). The time period between the 1500s and 1700s may be thought of as a transitional period, during which, gender roles were gradually reversed. The contemporary idea that men should be the primary weavers was ingrained in families through the *obraje* system and supported by the introduction of floor looms into the homes of Otavalans to replace backstrap weaving; this technology shift allowed for more efficient household production and more items to be offered at the market. Work in indigenous-run *obrajes* offered a somewhat safer space in which to learn the new technologies and materials imported by the Spanish, which would quickly dominate Otavalan production. As a result, contemporary Otavaleños often explain the current gendered division of labor by stating they feel that tradition dictates men as weavers, even though it appears that this “tradition” is a result of Spanish interference and that women were most likely the primary weavers in precolonial times (Callañaupa Alvarez 2007:48-60). Since their introduction, floor looms have changed not only the process but also ideas about textile production: “Within Andean languages, ideas about structure and technique in relation to weaving presuppose the tool as the basis of work, and the loom as the tool par excellence” (Arnold and Dransart 2014:6). I argue there is a hierarchy of craft

production that prioritizes weaving on a floor loom over all other forms of craft production, including portable handmade crafts, like those produced in the market by female vendors.

Though only men were officially required to fulfill periods of manual labor, this system taxed the entire family. Men would leave home for weeks at a time to fulfill their work quota, and in their absence, women and children became solely responsible for maintaining the household, as well as tending to the fields or producing textiles in order to supplement the meager wages from the *obrajes* – wages that were often never paid to the workers or their families. These added responsibilities most likely strengthened the need for strong kin networks, so that extended families could work together to accomplish the necessary tasks while men were fulfilling their work quotas in *obrajes*. Given the history of polities based on kinship, this new system most likely exploited and altered existing traditions. Kin networks have remained important among the Otavaleños even today, with the most successful Otavalans utilizing kin networks.

Another key factor in understanding gendered labor in textile production was the fiber being used. Prior to the introduction of cotton or wool, natural fibers were sourced from local plants. For example, *penca/cabuya* is a plant fiber, which is still used by some craft producers to crochet a certain style of cylindrical open-top bags/purses called *shigra* bags (See Chapters 4 and 6 for a more detailed discussion). Women were responsible for harvesting, cleaning, dyeing, and typically weaving with these natural fibers on backstrap looms. Cotton and wool changed production patterns, especially increasing the number of items a person could weave. Traditionally, women spun cotton by hand, while men began to spin wool using European spinning wheels, in order to increase efficiency and production (Borchart de Moreno 1995:16). Spinning by hand requires skill and time, while utilizing a spinning wheel produces yarn at a faster rate that allowed men to meet their production quotas in *obrajes*. By the late 1700s, because of the *obraje* system, weaving was solidified as belonging to the male domain (Graubart 2000:554). The *obrajes* have long since ceased production, but the pattern of gendered labor remains today. By utilizing an historical approach, my research shows how *obrajes* have impacted modern gendered labor in craft production and distribution, within the broader context of

a large body of literature focusing on Otavalan crafts and identity, which notes that Otavaleños have a long history of engagement with the global market.

CHAPTER 3. INDIGENEITY, GENDER, AND IDENTITY IN LATIN AMERICA

3.1 Views on Indigeneity

A common view of indigenous peoples as unchanging or as living relics of the past is unintentionally reinforced by tourist markets, like the world-famous Plaza de Ponchos in Otavalo, Ecuador (Babb 2011). Some have viewed indigenous groups as isolated, bounded, harmonious communities seeking to enhance social solidarity through levelling mechanisms and ritual practices (Wolf 1959; Wolf 1969; Foster 1972). Others have challenged this view of homogenous indigenous communities as falsely leveling important differences within indigenous communities that have led to different engagements with the global economy, accumulation of wealth, and political engagement (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999, 2009). While race and ethnicity are considered fluid, historically contingent categories in Latin America, racism is still a major issue for indigenous and Afro populations (Martínez Novo 2021; Alcalde 2022; Grosfoguel et al. 2015; Kyle 2000:26-27; de la Torre 1999; de la Cadena 1995; Shlossberg 2015; Canessa 2012). This is reflected in the language used to describe indigenous and Afro-Latin American populations. The terms '*indio*' [Indian] and '*cholo*' [defined differently, depending on the country and context] are still used as derogatory descriptions of others that imply ideas about uncleanness, poverty, rurality, and hypersexuality (Alcalde 2010; Alcalde 2022; Weismantel 2001; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009).

Indigenous people and ethnic groups are more likely to be perceived as agriculturalists or craft producers than artisans or artists (Wood 2008; Stephen 2005; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Little 2004), which is especially pertinent when indigenous peoples are perceived as commodifying their ethnicity to sell crafts (Brown 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Babb 2011). This is, of course, related to power in social interactions, as different occupations are afforded different levels of prestige. In many cases, indigeneity is linked with perceived authenticity, simplicity, and tradition; tourists expect native people to be static and unchanging, and indigenous groups often strategically adopt these narratives when describing the production of crafts in order to make a sale (Stephen 2005:31; Wood 2008; Meisch 2002; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Berlo and Phillips 1998; Brown 2004). Fulfilling tourists' expectations is economically

essential, and yet serves as fodder for critiques of indigenous populations as being inauthentic, overly modern, or abandoning tradition – all critiques I heard voiced by mestizos and whites in Ecuador. The identification of indigenous peoples and ethnic groups as craft producers reliant upon tourist markets has allowed some groups to achieve economic success, but it may not be economically sustainable; if tourist markets dry up, indigenous groups are, in effect, marketing themselves for short-term returns only (Prieto 2011; Babb 2011).

The instability of markets catering to foreign tourists can be seen through the 2020-2022 COVID-19 pandemic. For much of 2020, Ecuador closed its borders to foreign visitors to deal with the disease that overwhelmed their healthcare system and left dead bodies piled in the streets. Initially, the coastal region was hit by the disease at higher rates than the Andes, but COVID-19 has spared no community. While Otavalo fortunately experienced a lower death rate than other regions in the state, Ecuador's closed borders disrupted livelihoods. With no foreign tourists to visit the Plaza de Ponchos, Otavaleños had virtually no customers to buy their goods. Many have leveraged their vending skills by selling fruit to locals on street corners. Many have renewed their agricultural efforts on their very small plots of land. Although Ecuador has now reopened its national borders, many tourists are hesitant to travel internationally by plane, and are instead opting for local outdoor adventures they can access via private cars. The long-term impacts of the pandemic on Ecuador's economy and on the livelihood of Otavaleños remains to be seen, but this situation highlights the instability of economies reliant upon international tourist markets.

Some have envisioned an understanding of indigeneity as linked to power rather than tradition or modes of livelihood. Canessa argues that indigenous identity inherently implies resistance to hegemony, linked to “a claim to historical injustice” based on racial and ethnic othering of indigenous populations (Canessa 2012:69). Despite ethnic othering often being utilized by dominant groups to minimize the power and resistance of those deemed Other, ethnic affiliation can be a source for political mobilization (Martínez Novo 2021; Alcalde 2022; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Postero 2007; Madrid 2008).

3.1.1 “Unchanging Relics”

The view of indigenous peoples as unchanging or as living relics of the past is exacerbated by what Florence Babb termed “the tourism encounter” (2011). “The tourism encounter” refers to an often-brief interaction that reinforces tourists’ perceptions of indigenous peoples as static relics of the past who create mementos for tourists to take home in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy: tourists expect to have brief exchanges and purchase souvenirs that are representative of indigenous cultures, so indigenous peoples make and sell commodities using marketing strategies that meet these demands (Babb 2011:81; Tice 1995). Because interactions in the marketplace are brief, indigenous vendors have little opportunity to challenge these stereotypes of indigeneity, while these interactions serve to reinforce these stereotypes for tourists. In fact, many tourists feel that their views are completely realistic and not at all stereotypical because they experienced an interaction with an indigenous person firsthand (Babb 2011:81).

The “tourism encounter” is about more than purchasing a souvenir; it is about the experience the tourist has with the vendor, who they expect to represent a “simpler life.” Tourists often envision handicraft production as quaint and easy, something families and friends do when gathered to pass time. They underestimate the skill and time involved. As a result, they will often ask a vendor, “Did you make this?” or “Is this handmade?” Many vendors have learned to say, “Yes,” or “No, but my relative did,” [translated by author] if they want to make a sale. As we will see later, this highlights not only a vending strategy, but also a difference in conceptualizing “handmade.”

A fairly common scene from my fieldwork in the Plaza de Ponchos demonstrates that many vendors will distort the truth about an item’s origin, production method, or materials in order to make a sale. Although this is a common practice in the market, some vendors and locals are upset by such deception. A young woman from the U.S. was trying to buy a blanket from a neighboring stall, which prompted Andrea, a forty-year-old indigenous woman from Peguche, and her uncle Diego to tell me that the alpaca blankets being sold in the Plaza are actually made of synthetic fibers and not alpaca fleece at all (See Figure 3.1). These blankets typically cost between \$20-25, depending on the vendor and the haggling skills of the customer, although they sometimes sell for as high as \$35. To understand how the price of raw materials impacts the price of finished goods, Diego

told me that one kilo of raw, unprocessed alpaca fleece costs \$45 at minimum. Since producers need approximately one kilo to make a blanket, they could not possibly sell an alpaca blanket for less than \$60 to make any profit. This would provide little compensation for the producer's labor time.



Figure 3.1 Popular blankets sold in the Plaza de Ponchos, often described by vendors as made from alpaca fleece or a mixture of alpaca fleece and synthetic fibers. [Author photo]

To further demonstrate his point about the price of materials, which affects the price of finished items, Diego told me that his son went to Peru, bought raw alpaca fleece there, and brought it back to make a blanket for himself. He said that with import taxes, it often costs \$50 per kilo of alpaca fleece. He said that it is very difficult to find raw alpaca fleece both in Ecuador and in Peru, although it is more common in Peru because there are more alpacas being raised there. On previous research trips, I had been told that these blankets were a mixture of alpaca fleece and synthetic fibers and the ratio changed

depending on the producer. Therefore, I was surprised to hear Andrea and Diego say that they actually contain no alpaca fleece at all. The owners of a shop on the Plaza de Ponchos that features products handmade with natural materials from around Ecuador had previously told me the same thing, but not so insistently. When I mentioned that I had been told that these blankets were a mixture of alpaca and synthetic material, the shop owners had quickly revised their statement, saying they did not make the blankets, so they did not really know about the materials being used. Perhaps they were just being polite and did not want to undermine the marketing strategy of their competitors. The owners of this shop spoke with me on multiple occasions about the dangers of vendors misleading customers, as it undermines the reputations of all vendors in the area. Acutely aware that their business, as well as a large portion of Ecuador's economy relies on tourism, the owners were fearful of alienating tourists and losing their future business.

Diego called the vendors liars and was quite disgusted by their deception tactic. He also thought the customers should be better informed and the price alone should be an indicator of the material. From watching interactions in the market, he has learned most tourists do not know about materials, production techniques, or prices. As a result, he felt vendors must uphold a code of ethics to protect unsuspecting customers. As full-time producers who work predominantly with natural fibers and only sell items in the markets on Wednesdays and Saturdays, Diego and Andrea were especially sensitive to vendors misleading consumers because they feel it undermines their reputation as producer-vendors, as well as the reputation of their products.

Items made from alpaca fleece are known for their quality, softness, and high price tag. The blankets commonly called "alpaca blankets" in the Plaza de Ponchos appear soft and thick to the touch. If one has never touched an item made entirely of alpaca fleece, it is understandable that she would believe these blankets are made from a mixture of alpaca fleece and synthetic fibers and would be excited about the low price point. Andrea told me that producers can make the synthetic fibers softer through the finishing process ("*sacando los pelos*" or "fulling" in English) – the same finishing process that she and her family use on wool ponchos to make them softer. Thus, the blankets are a nicer product that also serves as a dupe for alpaca fleece to uninformed consumers. Diego was rather disgusted with this strategy of misleading customers to

make sales, and repeatedly called them liars. Although he was speaking to me, he did so in a voice loud enough that neighboring vendors could hear, perhaps hoping to shame them into altering their vending strategies.

Despite their outrage, Andrea told me that one of her cousins actually makes this style blanket. She explained that customers often think items are made from alpaca fleece and will confirm it with vendors, who almost always agree – whether the item contains alpaca fleece or not. She carries some scarves that people often mistake as being alpaca fleece, but she said she always corrects them because she does not want to be mistaken as a liar, even if it costs her from making a sale. I wonder how much of this is due to her religious beliefs as an Evangelical Christian, how much of this is due to personality, and how much of this is due to an effort to uphold her reputation as a producer-vendor who is in the minority in Peguche and Otavalo. Regardless of her motivation, I have observed Andrea correct customers about the fiber content of her products.

Because tourists often envision craft production as relatively unskilled and unchanging over time, they often do not recognize different styles of crafts. Most weavers will specialize in one production technique, such as the floor loom or the machinated hand weaving, which often means they also specialize in one fiber/material. Most painters are not experts as watercolors and metal art, so if a vendor is selling both styles, she is likely the artist of only one style. Likewise, vendors with handmade items and items from machinated processes are likely only the producer of one style. Yet, tourists expect indigenous peoples' production techniques and crafts to be as unchanging as they assume the people are. Therefore, they expect everything to be handmade with natural fibers. Thus, this view tourists hold of indigenous people as somehow timeless colors not only their expectations of people and the goods they produce and sell, but also the ways in which indigenous vendors uphold or challenge those notions of static culture, which is creating tension within the community about presentation of indigenous identity and how that relates to economic survival.

3.1.2 “Model Indians”

Early studies of Otavaleños portray them as “model Indians.” A classic text on the Imbabura Valley describes it as the “Awakening Valley,” in which “The Indians of

Otavalo are rising in a wave of vitality that is breaking the bonds of their traditional poverty, making them into a society of prosperous and independent citizens” (Collier and Buitrón 1949:2). The text claims there is nothing inherently unique about Otavalans, such that their story can serve as a model of success for other indigenous groups to employ. Yet, the authors describe Otavalans as being the ideal indigenous group, claiming it is their “culture that sets them apart from the other Ecuadorian Indians. So industrious, so full of personal enterprise are they becoming, that both travelers and native Ecuadorians are coming to regard them as different from other Indian groups” (Collier and Buitrón 1949:160). In this highly problematic and colonialist way, Otavaleños have been presented as “model Indians” that all other indigenous groups must mimic and follow on the path to success, which in this case, is social acceptance by foreigners and non-indigenous Ecuadorians, regardless of their own definitions of success.

While it would be easy to argue that this view of Otavaleños as ideal Indians is simply a dated, colonialist view of the 1940s, the theme continues in more recent scholarly texts and state descriptions. For instance, Linda D’Amico continues a trend common in literature about Otavalo that is informed by the assumption of early missionaries and the Ecuadorian state that labels Otavalans as ‘model Indians,’ (2011:57) as she builds on the work done by Elsie Clews Parsons (1945). Rather than challenging this assumption as dated, D’Amico supports it with language and imagery that essentializes Otavalans as model Indians. For example, she presents Otavalans as a static, unchanging indigenous group when she comments, “Parsons offers ethnographic snapshots of curing which are not unlike the scenes I observed in the 1990s” (D’Amico 2011:102).

Meisch dates the view of Otavalans as what she terms “model Indians” to the 1800s, with “the simultaneous depiction of Otavalos as the best of a bad lot” by members of the Ecuadorian state and by foreign visitors to Ecuador (Meisch 2002:30). Distinctions were made between Otavalans and other indigenous Ecuadorians, setting Otavalans as the ideal indigenous people: “Otavalos in the late nineteenth century were considered [by the state to be] ‘proud, clean, industrious, intelligent, and so on – [which] is in effect to commend them for having qualities that one is surprised to find among Indians and at the same time to damn other Indian groups with the implication that these are precisely the

qualities *they don't have*” (Casagrande 1981:260-261). Tourism and state promotions that depict Otavalans as “model Indians” also serve to degrade all other indigenous groups who have yet to achieve this status and has absolved the Ecuadorian state of any interventionist responsibility: “Touting the Otavalos’ success offers state officials a backhanded way to pin the poverty of other indigenous groups on their own failures” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009:46). Thus, this view of Otavaleños as “model Indians” cannot simply be explained as a dated notion of the past, as it is still upheld today by tourism agencies and state depictions, with detrimental impacts.

Exalting Otavalans at the expense of other indigenous Ecuadorian groups is a degrading conceptualization of indigeneity that reinforces stereotypes of dirty, lazy Indians by categorizing Otavalans as the exception that proves the rule. While obviously demeaning for other indigenous Ecuadorians, this stereotype is also negative for Otavaleños by limiting how they should dress, behave, and conduct themselves. It places a spotlight on indigenous Otavalans and lends support to the notion of them as unchanging relics; if their culture has already peaked as the best model of indigeneity, then why would there be a need to change? The logical fallacy continues that to change would be to deviate from perfection, ergo, change among indigenous communities is not desirable (from the perspective of non-indigenous populations and the state, in particular). This is, of course, limiting, highly problematic, and unrealistic, but indigenous Otavalans – especially women – face these pressures to minimize culture change and mitigate those changes in interactions with outsiders, sometimes resulting in performing identity specifically for outsiders. The “model Indian” stereotype also has the potential to pit other indigenous groups against Otavalans, if they do not feel that one path should be their only path to acceptance and success. Further, this view of Otavalans as “model Indians” allows for the continuation of racist and colonialist beliefs backed sometimes by state-sanctioned language (Martínez Novo 2021), and Otavaleños still frequently experience both racism and classism within Ecuador.

3.2 Envisioning Communities: Solidarity or Pluralism?

Many scholars have followed Émile Durkheim’s theories and studied indigenous and peasant communities in terms of social solidarity that considered indigenous

communities to be bounded and at odds with white and mestizo lifestyles. One such view is the study of the fiesta system, or the cargo system, as a way of life among many indigenous groups in Latin America. This system requires a *mayordomo* couple (sponsor/patrons/hosts) to sponsor each religious and life-cycle event celebration (Foster 1972). According to Wolf, the reasoning behind the fiesta-cargo system was that it was a tradition indigenous people employed to separate themselves from the mestizo national culture (1959). He explained that indigenous people build “a wall of distrust and hostility against outsiders” because of past negative relations with non-indigenous peoples (Wolf 1969:4). From this perspective from over half a century ago, indigenous people became isolationist out of self-preservation, and the fiesta-cargo system was seen to serve as a ritual reinforcement of community and enactment of the beliefs that make indigenous people different than those around them.

In addition to religious aspects of the fiesta-cargo system, the redistribution of wealth was interpreted by Wolf (1959, 1969) and other anthropologists as acting as a leveling mechanism that helped people of lower socioeconomic status. The fiesta-cargo system required people of higher socioeconomic status to give back to their community by sharing in food and celebration, while allowing less fortunate neighbors to enjoy a large feast and party. In fact, the *mayordomos* often save for years, sometimes pooling resources among extended family networks, before sponsoring celebrations that leave them in debt for as many as ten years (based on personal conversations). In theory, the fiesta system is an example of a redistributive economic system that prevents lower socioeconomic people from resenting those with higher socioeconomic standing because the well-off members have shared their wealth and indebted themselves so that the entire community may benefit from their good fortune. In doing so, the *mayordomo* temporarily falls behind economically, but rises in social status and political power. By serving as the patron of celebrations, *mayordomos* strengthen social bonds between community members through important events, and therefore, strengthen the social solidarity of the entire community. Essentially, the fiesta system was considered a tradition passed from generation to generation that gives indigenous communities an identity distinct from white and mestizo lifestyles, while creating and strengthening social ties between indigenous community members.

Historical studies of the fiesta-cargo system in the Andes also note that indigenous communities were separate and distinct from surrounding mestizo communities, but they emphasize the communal and communal nature of indigenous communities, often with descriptions that describe indigenous communities as ‘unchanging relics’ of the past (Pajuelo 2000). These studies also describe reciprocal relationships among extended kin networks and within indigenous communities, which reinforces kin and communal ties (Pajuelo 2000; Mayer 2002; Walter 1981). Reinforcing these important social ties supports vending networks. Yet, those who have converted to Evangelical Protestantism do not participate in the fiesta-cargo system, which represents a change in a longstanding cultural practice, dating to the Spanish colonial implementation of the system to leverage indigenous authorities to control indigenous communities. This is not to say that collective practice has not undergone many changes and political uses, but I found that an aspect of conversion to Protestantism that did come up in conversation was that those households no longer participated in the communal ceremonies and the social networks reinforced through those shared occasions.

While some of the literature referenced here focuses on Mexico, the fiesta-cargo system is a colonial implementation that was used throughout Spanish colonies (although its implementation varied based on the community and its indigenous authorities). As Martínez Novo noted, “An old and strong relationship exists between Mexican and Ecuadorian indigenismo,” not only as a result of Spanish colonial rule, but as both nations worked to overthrow that rule, and through intellectual exchanges (2021:157). Debates over tradition and modernity centered on the role of indigenous communities in relation to the Ecuadorian state began shortly after Ecuador’s independence in 1809, with some arguing for preservation and transformation of existing indigenous cultural practices, and others championing existing community organization for assimilationist potential (Martínez Novo 2021:159-160).

In the past, scholars viewed social solidarity – built on unity without dissent – as the strength of indigenous communities that allowed them to address the encroachment of outside influences, while also serving as the foundation for indigenous movements that championed indigenous rights. More recently, scholars have challenged this view of harmonious indigenous communities and called for an exploration of differences within

indigenous communities as both more reflective of reality and as a source of community strength. For example, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld “argues that this internal pluralism – not the sharing of core values – has driven the politics, uprisings, and electoral victories of Latin America’s most comprehensive indigenous movement” (2009:xiii). He argues that social solidarity is not the only form of indigenous community strength and that differences within communities, which he calls pluralism, can be a catalyst for change, rather than undermining communities. Writing, “the community is ultimately the home base of Andean peasant social and economic organization,” Enrique Mayer argues that Andean communities are best understood in terms of “conflicts, contradictions, and process of change” (2002:xv). This differs from the Durkheimian view of social solidarity as the necessary glue for society and dissention as detrimental to solidarity. While past studies of social solidarity have been helpful in understanding differences between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, these kinds of studies assume that all indigenous communities are the same and erase differences within indigenous communities that prove informative when studying differential access to wealth, power, and prestige that tends to be compounded by engagement in craft economies (for example, Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). Studying differences within indigenous communities in Latin America is a way of conceptualizing indigeneity that allows us to ask new questions, as Colloredo-Mansfeld models in *Fighting Like a Community* (2009) and, much more recently, Carmen Martínez Novo does in *Undoing Multiculturalism: Resource Extraction and Indigenous Rights in Ecuador* (2021).

Indigenous communities have changed drastically over my research interlocutors’ lifetimes. Most commonly, interlocutors reported that their communities are now larger, more populated, and more modernized (characterized by indoor plumbing, electricity, streets with paving stones/cement, bigger houses constructed in different styles/materials) than they had been during their childhood. They also noted the demographics of their communities were changing. Previously, indigenous people and mestizos lived in distinct communities. Thus, it is understandable that previous studies observed the differences between indigenous and mestizo communities. In the past, many of the indigenous communities were incredibly poor and lacking the aforementioned amenities that my interlocutors associate with modernity. The communities that once housed only

indigenous people now host both mestizos and indigenous people, all of whom are more economically prosperous than in the past, according to my interlocutors. Further, many indigenous people have moved out of the Otavalo area to larger cities. Some observed that neighborhoods and communities seem to stay relatively equal in terms of economic status because the wealthy move elsewhere as soon as they obtain wealth, so that there are not obviously wealthy and poor communities now as there were in the past. My observations (informed by Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999) indicate that some socioeconomic disparity exists between communities, but according to my interlocutors, it is less significant than in the past. Thus, we can understand how in the past, solidarity may have seemed essential for the survival of poor indigenous communities. However, in this dissertation internal pluralism is the lens used to better understand the contemporary lived realities of indigenous Otavalans.

3.3 Conceptualizations of Gender and Identity

Gender in the Andes, especially among indigenous populations, is typically described by the concept of gender complementarity, which conceives of gender as consisting of two complementary spheres that are dependent upon one another but do not overlap; furthermore, these spheres are equally important, not hierarchically structured, and is most clearly recognized through the gendered division of labor (Harris 2008; Larson, Harris, and Tandeter 1995; Prieto et al. 2010). In *The Two-Headed Household* (1998), Sarah Hamilton describes the concept of gender complementarity: “In highland communities where people maintain traditional indigenous forms of social organization, women and men control the means and fruits of agricultural production in an egalitarian manner. Sustaining a balance of power between wife and husband is considered essential if a household is to flourish” (1998:1). Otavalan craft production could be viewed through the theory of gender complementarity in that women and men are responsible for separate, and in theory, equally important tasks. Women are supposedly restricted from weaving, although their “help” is welcomed in preparing for weaving and in finishing a product, while the act of weaving is considered the domain of men. Thus, it has been argued in the literature that the work of men and women exists in separate, complementary spheres.

However, in reality, these ideal gender divisions may be transgressed depending on the circumstances. In fact, many Otavalans express their current gendered labor as a result of “what was always done,” a tradition, rather than some sort of taboo or restriction. Further, Otavaleños increasingly believe the notion of separate men and women’s work is an antiquated idea – one that belongs in the past and is generally still held only by the elderly and “the *machistas*,” meaning those who uphold hegemonic masculinity and rigid gender division of labor as association with notions of tradition, known as *machismo*. When asked if there is separate men and women’s work, one interviewee responded “no, everyone does what needs to be done” [translated by author]. Another said, “everyone has hands, and so they [use them to] work” [translated by author]. Yet, when pressed, most interviewees could detail separate men and women’s work and potential repercussions for transgressing these norms. According to my interlocutors, women generally cook, take care of the house and children, and sell handicrafts, while men usually take care of the land/agriculture, business, and finances. They explained this division based on knowledge and skills rather than taboos or restrictions. Yet, men’s work is generally more highly valued than women’s work: “Women’s subsistence production, reproductive labor, and even cash incomes have become devalued within households dependent on male wages” (Hamilton 1998:25).

Miguel – an indigenous Otavalan man who makes knitted items like scarves and hats with machinated hand weaving technology at his home in Peguche – told me that gendered divisions of labor existed in the past because men were in a position of power in the family and used that power to dictate what women should do: “I think before men were – what is that word? – *machistas*, I think it is. That’s it. It’s because of that. [The *machistas*] They would say, [to the women] ‘no, you have to do that. I go to work, and you, your obligations are here [in the home].’ But now, that *machismo* is over” [translated by author]. He said that women’s work was not previously valued, which was unfair. He saw rigid gendered divisions of labor of the past as restrictive and worse for everyone. For instance, if a man “‘helped’ around the home” – which was considered women’s work – he was belittled by his family and community members; he would be labeled as a “*mandarino*,” a derogatory term for a man who is bossed around [likely from “*mandar*,” which means “to order” or “to request”] that was mentioned by many

interview respondents. Hamilton describes expectations of gendered labor in the Ecuadorian Andes:

women bow to cultural constructs of appropriate behavior for married mothers, whose leaving home to work would shame both their husbands and themselves. Women must also perform most reproductive labor, as their husbands consider it an ‘insult’ to be asked to perform housework or child care. The essentially patriarchal nature of household social organization has not been renegotiated along more gender-egalitarian lines between breadwinning marriage partners (Hamilton 1998:12).

For example, Claudia explained that in the past, men who completed work deemed to be women’s labor “were called names like ‘*mandarina*.’ The community talked about them. To some extent, this *machismo* still exists today. For example, I have never seen my dad cook, but my husband can” [translated by author]. Claudia’s comment speaks to the generally held belief among my interlocutors that ideas about gendered labor have changed over time, with younger generations being less likely to uphold *machismo* and rigid gendered divisions of labor. Claudia continued that in the past, “Men didn’t value women’s work. It reflected badly on men that they couldn’t care for their family, so women had to work” outside the home for money [translated by author]. In other words, men were expected to be the sole providers. Women working outside the home signaled a failing on the part of the man to adequately complete men’s work. Therefore, both men and women were judged as violating norms about gendered labor when indigenous Otavalan women were employed outside the home. What should be noted is that the idea of a male breadwinner is a middle-class, predominantly mestizo idea that was not historically practiced by peasants, the working class, or indigenous peoples. It is well documented that indigenous women have a long history of engaging in labor outside the home in agriculture, hacienda, and even obraje work, so it is interesting that the Otavalans with whom I spoke agreed on this version of the past that they have created for themselves, adopting more middle-class ideas. Others have mentioned that in the past, if women with a *machista* husband or father worked outside the home, their husband or father would be judged as being a lesser man who was unable to provide for his family. The legacy of these ideas lingers today, such that selling crafts in the

marketplace is one of the most socially accepted forms of paid labor for indigenous women, as it builds on the role of crafts as integral to indigenous Otavalan identity.

Although many Otavaleños believe the view on gendered labor is changing or has already changed, observations and interviews still signal the continuance of gendered tasks, although they may be less rigidly upheld today than in the past. Most research interlocutors believe that *machismo* and *machistas* are a thing of the past or are dying out with the older generations. Only one contact, Daniela, told me that she did not see *machismo* going away any time soon. Daniela is not involved in craft production or distribution, but she is knowledgeable and introspective on her culture. One day, when discussing how things have changed in her lifetime, she told me that racism and sexism are still very real problems. She said, “most indigenous Otavalans will say ‘they are not problems anymore, they are only things of the past,’” but she sadly remarked that she believed that was not the case [translated by author]. She was concerned that women, in particular, who believe *machismo* has disappeared are allowing it to continue by not questioning instances when their husbands or fathers put themselves in a position of authority where they have the final say over family matters. She implied the power dynamics may shift back to how they were in the past, with *machismo* reinstated and men having the ultimate say. Because gendered labor is fluid and women’s labor is often overlooked, the theory of gender complementarity is limited in understanding the gendered labor of Otavalan craft production.

In my project, I focus predominantly on women’s labor because I argue it has been invisibilized in the literature, and a focus on women’s labor may provide insight into changing gender relations. I intentionally use the word “invisibilized” because this is an active erasure of women’s labor from conceptualizations of economic life. Other scholars have noted that women’s economic labor is made to be invisible: “Feldman (1991:74) notes that petty-commodity production research has been characterized by a ‘relative absence of women in analyses...and the neglect of women’s contributions to home-based or family enterprises.’ Reasons for this include the following: (1) women’s and children’s unpaid work often remains invisible; (2) this work is defined as ‘unproductive work’; and (3) household members’ interests are often viewed as homogenous (Feldman 1991:66)” (Tice 1995:10). Writing about her life as a miner’s

wife in Boliva, Domitila Barrios de Chungara (Barrios de Chungara and Viezzer 1978) describes the exploitation of her community and how women's labor is actively erased in the context of this exploitative system. She explains the significance of women's unpaid labor contributions, not only on a familial/household level, but as contributing to the national economy, despite its lack of recognition: "So that way we made our compañeros understand that we really work, and even more than they do in a certain sense. And that we even contribute more to the household with what we save [by not paying others for the tasks women complete]. So, even though the state doesn't recognize what we do in the home, the country benefits from it, because we don't receive a single penny for this work" (Barrios de Chungara and Viezzer 1978:35). Thus, this is an active erasure of women's labor that is highlighted by ethnographic examples throughout the dissertation.

Still, in order to understand gendered labor relations, we must also look at men's work and how it relates to masculinity/ies. While I do not explicitly study masculinities in this project, my work is informed by R. W. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity as shaping the ideal of how men should behave, and thus erasing alternative expressions of gender. Indigenous masculinities are an emerging field of research that remains understudied in Latin America. The edited volume *Indigenous Men and Masculinities* (Innes and Anderson 2015) is a notable exception that focuses on masculinities among indigenous populations in North America and New Zealand, which shapes my understanding of gender relations among indigenous Otavalans. Kimberly Theidon (2009) and Matthew Gutmann (2007, 1996) have also approached masculinities from the perspective that gender identities are formed and upheld by both men and women. Studying gender does not simply mean studying women; of interest are the relationships between men and women, and how these dynamics shape both ideal and enacted concepts of gender for Otavalans. Building on Theidon's recognition that the default identity is often perceived to be male such that "'gender' was not an issue" (Theidon 2009:30), I argue that in the literature on Otavalo, to be an artisan is to be male, so women have been ignored as serious craft producers.

Since gender is enacted through labor performed in daily life, we can combine theoretical perspectives about gender and economic anthropology to analyze gendered divisions of labor in order to more fully understand economic activities, which is the

focus of the edited volume *Gender at Work in Economic Life* (Clark 2003). To better understand “the broadest possible range of economic activity” (Clark 2003:ix), we must understand gendered divisions of labor in production, distribution, and consumption, as well as the values and ideals surrounding what is considered appropriate gendered labor to gain a better understanding of the ways in which gender supports the economic system and the ways in which economic systems can reinforce and reproduce gender expectations. By analyzing moments of transgression, we can better understand the potential for economic and social change. The gendered division of labor is directly linked to the economic system, which is reflected in my research question: What kind of work do women do, and which forms of labor are rendered visible and invisible to different parties (especially regarding gendered labor in craft production)? *Gender at Work in Economic Life* (Clark 2003) provides some insight by noting that the work women do is often labeled as something other than work: “women in many complex societies act as craft production specialists, but there is a strong tendency to consider craft production as something else if women do it” (Pyburn 2003:13).

Perhaps most important to this project are theories that view gender as a process. There are several authors who approach gender as relational or performative (for example: Butler 1999; Jaime 2013; Bueno-Hansen 2015; Canessa 2012; Theidon 2009; Gutmann 2007; Gutmann 1996). Scholars have built on Butler’s (1999) notion of performativity that our gender is an ongoing negotiation of our actions and beliefs, that we both enact and embody gender in our daily lives (for example, Stone 2014). Performativity highlights ongoing action and process as we study gender: “Today we study gender as a social process. Cultural constructions of gender are considered to be something that we as human actors ourselves continually generate in our everyday lives” (Stone 2014:7). Andrew Canessa, for example, explains that “Gender is simultaneously a mode for men and women to be in the world as it is a language for understanding a wide set of relations” (2012:145). Writing about indigenous populations in the Andes of Bolivia, “gender – as with personhood generally – is usually spoken of in terms of processes and activities,” such that one is born without a gender that must be developed over time, through continual performances that meet expectations of others (Canessa

2012:126). Thus, gender becomes both a way of being and a lens for viewing the world (Canessa 2012:145).

By viewing gender as a process, the tasks one repeatedly performs are essential in creating and maintaining a gender identity and worldview. Historically among Incan textile producers, both men and women could be involved in shearing, washing, spinning, winding, skeining, plying, dyeing, warping, weaving, and finishing; however, weaving was traditionally done by women (Callañaupa Alvarez 2007:48-60). For contemporary Otavaleños, women and men are part of every step of the production process, although certain tasks are still gendered. Spinning is generally completed by women, while warping and weaving are generally completed by men (Meisch 2002; Meisch 1997). However, there are cases when prescribed gender roles are transgressed, highlighting the importance of repetitive work in the creation of an Otavalan gender identity, rather than strict taboos dictating labor roles. To date, not much has been written about female Otavalan craft producers, especially those who weave textiles, a gap which this research aims to fill.

As I have argued above, the gendered labor in craft production among Otavaleños is not determined by taboos but rather by tradition. The notion that indigenous Otavalans are continuing gendered tasks as ‘they were always done’ is important for enacting one’s heritage and identity as an indigenous Otavalan. During this research, the “natural” strength, speed, and endurance of men and woman was repeatedly cited by interlocutors as explanation for the current iteration of gendered labor in craft production. In other words, men weave because it is physically hard work and they are physically stronger, so they can weave faster than women; further, few women are willing and/or capable of such hard manual labor, they say. Oddly enough, this same justification applies to machinated hand weaving, which often consists of entering a program into a computer and/or pressing a sequence of buttons. To me, knowledge of technology and knowledge of weaving techniques – rather than physical strength – would be a more compelling argument regarding the labor associated with machinated hand weaving. Regardless, the tasks one repeatedly performs are essential in creating and maintaining a gender identity. While there is more flexibility in Otavalan gendered labor in textile production and

distribution today than there was in the past, there are still clear ideas about the ideal performance of gender through specific tasks.

Applying the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) to this research, indigenous Otavalan women are multiply marginalized through their gender, cultural and national citizenship, and indigeneity (Torres, Mirón, and Inda 1999; Grosfoguel et al. 2015; Alcalde 2022). Stone writes, “it has become clear that women, even within one society, can differ widely in their perceptions of gender, depending on factors such as class position” (2014:5). The way in which women navigate and reshape what is expected of them demonstrates forms of oppression and opportunities for agency in shifting expectations and gendered labor for future generations. Socioeconomic standing also becomes important because it both provides opportunities for indigenous people to enter spaces previously restricted to social and economic elites, which in the past meant whites and mestizos (de la Torre 1999; D’Amico 2011). As the number of Otavalans who are considered middle class increases, and as the number of indigenous people who choose to identify as mestizo increases, Ecuadorians of all ethnicities and economic backgrounds are forced to reassess stereotypes of ‘dirty Indians’ and reconsider the role of money and wealth in regard to social capital (de la Torre 1999; D’Amico 2011).

Race and ethnicity are more fluid categories in Ecuador than they are typically imagined in the U.S., but they are still a source of discrimination against indigenous peoples, who are perceived as ‘backwards,’ ‘dirty,’ and impoverished, and as such, are treated as “second-class citizens” (Kyle 2000:26-27; de la Torre 1999; de la Cadena 1995; Shlossberg 2015; Canessa 2012). As Alcalde explains, “In postcolonial societies, social power continues to be organized and exerted as a result of the structures and practices developed through centuries of colonialism. The living conditions in postcolonial societies are thus informed by persistent unequal colonialist structures within which some identities and experiences are valued over others” (2022:60). The term ‘mestizo’ describes the majority of Latin Americans, but it also implies a certain privilege: “The word *mestizo* refers to the majority of Ecuadorians whose identity blends Amerindian and European physical and cultural heritages. In daily discourse it is an exclusionary identity that is ethnically white and closely identified with the dominant, Spanish-speaking national culture of cities and provincial towns” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009:10). Thus, to claim

mestizo identity is often a way to claim not being indigenous to avoid the discrimination and oppression associated with being indigenous (Alcalde 2022). Being mestizo means having social capital and privilege often denied to indigenous peoples in Latin America. As de la Torre explains, the terms indigenous and mestizo are

social and cultural constructs which refer to physical features and appearance, language, dress style, rural or urban origin, and Kichwa or Spanish surname. The fluidity of this system of racial and ethnic stratification, where changing dress and hair style or learning to speak 'proper' Spanish, for example, can transform an Indian into a mestizo makes it difficult to differentiate clearly between these categories (1999:93).

Although the categories of Indian/indigenous and mestizo vary across Latin America, there is always a social hierarchy that privileges whiteness and mestizos over people of indigenous and African descent. Alcalde observes, "These 'internal Others' are part of the nation but only in the exclusionary sense that they are denied rights afforded to the rest of the population both through national policies and everyday practices. The racialized Othering of these groups does not prevent elite groups from benefitting from them by objectifying internal 'Otherness' as sources of tourist attraction and cheap labor" (2022:62). As de la Torre indicated, this hierarchical social system allows for people to move from indigenous to mestizo by changing their speech and appearance, nearly always accompanied by wealth and a move from a rural to a more urban setting. This fluidity has led some to (mistakenly) remark that racism in Ecuador does not exist. As early as the 1940s, this argument was made: "Fortunately there exists no true race prejudice. The fact that any Indian, if he speaks Spanish, may become 'mestizo' or even 'white' simply by abandoning his community and changing his costume is an indication that the abuse of the Indian is not for his race but for the humble and resigned position associated with his clothes and culture" (Collier and Buitrón 1949:90-91). It is vital to note that the authors remark on a supposed absence of "race prejudice" while the text upholds racist stereotypes about indigenous peoples and perpetuates the view of Otavalans as "model Indians."

A discussion of racism in the Andes requires an understanding of class: "The need to pin down labor dissolved into a social preoccupation with keeping Indians in their place – and a generalized contempt for those who supposedly forget it" (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009:62). More recently, Grosfoguel et al. (2015) and Alcalde (2022) have analyzed the

ways in which racial hierarchies are reproduced by Latin American diaspora populations in their destination states, as they seek a sense of belonging and familiarity “in a space of power relations that is already informed and constituted by coloniality” (Grosfoguel et al. 2015:641). Because Afro-Latin American and indigenous populations were historically viewed as free (as slaves) or cheap (as indentured workers filling mandatory labor quotas) sources of labor, occupying the lowest social classes, the contemporary ‘phenomena’ of wealthy indigenous populations in Latin America seems an almost incomprehensible oxymoron for some. For many, to ‘be Indian’ is to be poor.

While racial categories may be more fluid and allow for people to move between categories, “being Indian” has still implied being dirty, impoverished, rural laborers. Because of the negative connotations of ‘*indio*,’ (‘Indian’ in Spanish) there has been a push for identification as ‘*indígena*,’ (‘indigenous’ in Spanish) implying rights and perhaps reverence as being the first peoples of the Andes (for example, see Canessa 2012). This is not a return to the noble savage view, but rather, a way of reclaiming the heritage associated with indigenous identities as positive influences on and perhaps challenges to national identities. There are tensions in the effort to make different claims about indigeneity: “In CONAIE publications, native autonomy is meant to coincide with greater political involvement at the center of national government (CONAIE 1994). Yet, on the ground and couched in racial narratives, autonomy becomes isolation, and the richness of modern Kichwa culture gets lost in stereotypes of violence and irrationality” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009:119).

CONAIE, or the Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) in a national confederation formed in 1986 that has led the indigenous movement throughout Ecuador, which is rather unique in Latin America. CONAIE has successfully acknowledged Ecuadorian indigenous groups as distinct but equal, with their own struggles and goals, in a way that creates a pan-indigenous identity and yields more bargaining power by externally presenting a mostly united front, backed by larger numbers (Lucero 2006; Jameson 2011). More recently, indigenous movements have made progress in gaining rights and forcing the government to rethink its view of indigenous people in Ecuador (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:85). The indigenous movement in Ecuador has successfully fought for Ecuador to be deemed a

plurinational state, when the 2008 constitution recognized different indigenous groups throughout Ecuador as distinct nations within the larger state (Jameson 2011). This was a major win in combatting discrimination, although indigenous peoples still face discrimination and oppression from the state (Martínez Novo 2021). Federal recognition of indigenous peoples as competent economic and political actors has increased “public attention to indigenous concerns that were often invisible” to non-indigenous peoples (Lucero 2006:23). This has empowered indigenous peoples with “a sense of possibility that was unknown” before the Ecuadorian indigenous movement gained strides in the 1990s (Lucero 2006:24), but has not, as Martínez Novo (2021) points out, been a panacea.

Despite the advancements of the indigenous movement, and the state’s cooptation of indigenous symbols, indigenous and marginalized peoples still experience oppression and discrimination. Domitila Barrios de Chungara writes about the significant economic contributions of Bolivian miners, who face discrimination and exploitation: “The miners suffer another misfortune: despite the fact that they support the national economy with their sweat and blood, throughout their lives they’re despised by everyone, because people are terrified of us and think that we’ll give them our disease, even though it isn’t true” (Barrios de Chungara and Viezzer 1978:28). Although Otavalans are engaged in craft work rather than mining, and this observation was made more than forty years ago in Bolivia, this passage struck me because there are parallels with Otavalo. Otavalan crafts and the tourism they draw supports Ecuador’s economy, while the people still experience racism, classism, and sexism, largely as a result of untrue stereotypes. Barrios de Chungara (Barrios de Chungara and Viezzer 1978) also describes how state messaging differs from the lived reality of Bolivian miners. Much more recently, Martínez Novo (2021) has observed the ways in which the Ecuadorian state coopts indigenous symbols to promote messaging that does not resonate with the lived experience of indigenous peoples.

In Ecuador, ethnicity and race are linked in that they are both fluid categories tied to the presentation of self, rather than solely based on blood; as such, the categories of white, mestizo (or mixed), indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorian are flexible. Although phenotype, accent, clothing, and even a person’s last name provide clues to a person’s race or ethnicity, there is also a certain amount of social mobility, although not boundless.

Thus, an indigenous person can cut his hair, wear jeans, and pass for mestizo, so long as he has enough wealth. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, “I used to be indigenous, but now I’m mestizo” [translated by author]. What he really means is that he used to be poor, live in a rural setting, have long hair, and speak Spanish with an accent influenced by Kichwa, but he has chosen to distance himself from that in order to have more social capital. I intentionally say ‘he’ in this example because this is more likely to occur among men, for reasons I will discuss below. The tenuous relationship between race, ethnicity, and class forces indigenous people to make difficult decisions about their identity and future opportunities, especially as Otavalan women find themselves multiply marginalized through their gender, cultural and national citizenship, and indigeneity.

Despite continuing racism and discrimination, indigenous people may ‘become mestizo’ by altering their speech, clothing, hairstyle, and/or residence (de la Torre 1999), but this is more difficult for women, who are considered inherently “more Indian” (de la Cadena 1995). Canessa elaborates on this idea: “Women, after all, have a different relationship with the (post) colonial state and the way it employs structures and imagery that render indians more feminine and indian women ‘more indian’” (2012:88). As the author explains, one can be ‘more’ or ‘less’ indigenous among many Andean societies, depending on a complex interaction of variables that include skin tone, language/accents, clothing, hairstyle, money/wealth. Yet, women are typically considered ‘more indigenous’ because there is a recognition that they typically have less power, and they are stereotypically expected to continue ‘traditions’ – meaning they are expected to represent pre-Columbian life in food, clothing, important beliefs, and forms of knowledge. Because indigenous Otavalan women are perceived as ‘more Indian,’ there is pressure for them to uphold this stereotype at the expense of changing. Indigenous women may feel additional pressures to commodify their ethnicity, which has the potential to reinforce or transform gender relations. Some women, however, may use this in a way that is beneficial in the marketplace, as women may strategically use their ethnicity to fulfill tourists’ desires and make sales.

Intersectionality as a method is useful to assess the ways in which Otavalans think about their identity and how they are multiply marginalized through their gender, cultural and national citizenship, and indigeneity (influenced by Alcalde 2022 and Grosfoguel et

al. 2015). Female vendors strategically highlight their indigeneity in the market in order to sell to tourists. Many vendors deliberately wear traditional clothing (locally called *de anaco*) because it clearly marks them as indigenous, knowing that tourists want to purchase an experience, not just a handicraft. They have learned that the intersection of their gender and ethnicity can provide them with opportunities, while operating within a state that discriminates against them on the same axes of identity. Intersectionality is an important theoretical perspective in this dissertation because it highlights the ways in which indigenous women are both oppressed by their identity and have also found ways to use this identity to their advantage in the market.

More recently, indigeneity has been conceptualized as a political choice to resist the hegemony of the state. Acknowledging that the status of “Indian” was a colonial and later state construct (Canessa 2012:6), some are using the concept of indigeneity to reshape their engagement with the state as a form of political resistance: “Participating in the [indigenous] movement became a new way of being indigenous, while self-conscious, overt displays of indigenous culture became a new way of being political” (Collaredo-Mansfeld 2009:12). Indigenous people throughout Latin America have started reclaiming their language, dress, and hairstyles as ways to reassert their identity, often while making a political statement about what made them unique from mestizos and even other indigenous groups. In describing their relationship to the state, “a claim to indigenous identity is at its root quite simply a claim to historical injustice; it is a claim to rights and resources on the basis of long-standing exclusion” (Canessa 2012:69). In other words, the subordinate relationship indigenous peoples have endured has become as integral to their identity as their traditions, language, and beliefs. Contemporary scholars are noting the ways in which contemporary indigenous populations are using their identity to simultaneously acknowledge a history of prejudice and fight for rights, protection, and inclusion in the state.

3.3.1 Men’s Work and Machinated Hand Weaving

I argue that in the literature on Otavalan crafts, to be an artisan is to be male (building on Thiedon’s argument detailed above – Theidon 2009). Because Otavalans are famous for producing textiles, much of this literature studies textiles and focuses on male

weavers, overlooking and erasing women's contributions as craft producers. Following the trend of ethnographies about Otavalo that focus on male weavers, men's work and machinated hand weaving will be described here as background information for my ethnographic findings on women's roles in crafts, especially as producers of portable handmade items and as vendors in the market (detailed in Chapter 5).

During my semi-structured ethnographic interviews, I asked interviewees questions about craft production, materials and style, market knowledge, and identity. More interview questions and responses are included elsewhere. One interview question was: Do you feel textiles are important for indigenous Otavalans? [translated by author as: ¿Siente que los tejidos son importantes para los indígenas Otavaleños?] (See Appendix for Interview Guide). Jazmin replied, "Yes, they are important to maintain tradition" [translated by author]. Claudia answered, "Yes, they are essential to not lose our culture" [translated by author]. Carolina stated, "Textiles are important for our survival as indigenous Otavalans" [translated by author]. For all three women, textiles are essential for contemporary Otavalans because they provide connections to their heritage as indigenous Otavaleños as well as a means for continued economic survival by providing a significant portion of Otavalans with craft related livelihoods. One couple's response was even stronger, indicating that textiles are emblematic of Otavalan identity, both for Otavaleños and for outsiders alike; in a joint interview with husband-and-wife Eduardo and Pilar, they said, "Yes, textiles are an important identifying characteristic of Otavalans" [translated by author]. In light of these responses, it is understandable that the literature on Otavalo highlights textile production and has often focused on male weavers. However, Otavalan craft production is changing, and so is the gendered labor surrounding Otavalan crafts.

As described in Chapter 1, handweaving textiles on floor looms is increasingly rare as a production method for Otavalan textiles. Rather, Otavaleños are increasingly utilizing machinated hand weaving technology, which is not fully handwoven, nor is it fully industrialized. As with handweaving on floor looms, men are more likely to be the producers of textiles using machinated hand weaving technology.

Machinated hand weaving builds on traditions of handweaving and pushes the boundaries of authenticity as it relates to indigenous craft production. In response to the

same interview question above (“Do you feel textiles are important for indigenous Otavalans?”), Isabel replied, “Before, textiles were important for us because they were our work, but now, everything is industrial and produced on machines. Now, you hook up a machine and it does everything. Even embroidering the blouses we indigenous women wear, you press a button, and a computer does it all” [translated by author]. For Isabel, the notion of work is tied to the skill and craftsmanship involved in handmaking items. From her perspective, a reliance on machine technology signals a shift from work done with one’s hands to production done by a machine. Isabel is not alone in her perspective that the incorporation of machinated hand weaving technology has signaled a shift in Otavalans’ relationship with crafts, as demonstrated by the following interview responses.

In interviews, I also asked: What makes an item “artisanal”? [translated by author as: ¿Qué hace un producto artesanal?] (See Appendix for Interview Guide). In a joint interview with Concepción and her mother Ana, Concepción did most of the speaking. Both women are vendors, although Ana is rarely in the market due to severe health issues. Concepción felt that certain items are inherently artisanal in nature, saying: “Hats, sweaters, ponchos are all made by hand or woven [by hand], so these are artisanal. Tablecloths are not because a computer does all the work. It is important that quality materials are used, but the specific materials depend on personal preference” [translated by author]. For Concepción, the quality of the material is significant, but the type of material (ex: natural vs. acrylic) is not a factor in her determination of an item as being artisanal or not. Most telling was her delineation between production techniques: handmade/handwoven products were artisan in nature, while goods produced with machinated hand weaving technology were not artisanal. Like Isabel’s response above, many Otavalans express the sentiment that a reliance on machines and computers shifts production so it is no longer deemed “work.” As Isabel said, “you press a button, and a computer does it all,” thus one’s body is not perceived to be involved in the manual labor associated with work and with producing crafts. Isabel and Concepción’s responses poignantly state what many Otavalans expressed to me: while machinated hand weaving is prevalent and necessary to meet higher consumer demand, items produced by machinated hand weaving are not considered by Otavalans to be high-quality, artisanal

items. Further, items produced by machinated hand weaving are viewed as less essential to Otavalan work and identity, according to Otavaleños with whom I spoke.

In a joint interview with husband-and-wife Eduardo and Pilar, they answered the same question (What makes an item “artisanal”?) saying, “Nothing, because we don’t really have *artesanías* anymore. They are only *artesanías* if they are handmade. We are producers, we use machines” [translated by author]. Notice the word choice of *artesanías* [handicrafts], rather than *artesanal* [artisanal], since *artesanías* has been used more frequently by Otavalans and by others to describe Otavalan crafts. As producer-vendors, Eduardo and Pilar acknowledged the need for them to use machinated hand weaving technology to produce items in larger quantities to meet demands set by tourists and other vendors. It would be impossible for them to meet demand by handweaving each item. Yet, they do not recognize the items they produce as artisanal or as handicrafts because of the scale of production based on machinated hand weaving.

Another interview question asked about the sense of identity and ownership of Otavalan products: What makes an item “Otavalan”? [translated by author as: ¿Qué hace que un producto Otavaleño? ¿Cuáles son las calidades de un producto Otavaleño?] (See Appendix for Interview Guide). In a joint interview with neighbors Emilia and Alicia, and Alicia’s brother Félix, Félix did most of the talking, with the women speaking up when they had something to add. Félix said, “An item is Otavalan because of our hard work that goes into producing it. We improve products and designs with modernization and machines. These have our symbols of identity and culture, and they are the base for our families” [translated by author]. Other responses to this question are incorporated into other sections of this dissertation, but the general theme is the sense of hard work and the association of crafts and/or textiles with Otavalans. Félix’s response was significant in his inclusion of innovation. He was unique in highlighting the incorporation of “machines,” or machinated hand weaving, to produce more crafts in response to consumer demand, acknowledging that continuing to use more advanced technology to produce crafts builds on a historical legacy of incorporating technological advances to expand production (ex: the shift from backstrap weaving to floor looms). He also highlights that any form of craft production entails hard work and requires specific skills that must be learned and honed. Thus, for Félix, innovation is not at odds with authenticity because Otavaleños have a

long history of altering designs, incorporating new materials, and adapting production techniques to meet consumer demands. We can further explore the tension between these ethnographic interview responses by turning to specific instances of men's work performed in craft production.

Emilia and her husband are producer-vendors, who had four machinated hand weaving looms at their home/production site for most of 2017-2018. Despite supplying most of the vendors in the Plaza de Ponchos in addition to stocking her own stall in Otavalo and in Quito, Emilia did not consider their production site to be large. She explained how production works:

We're not so big. Four men plus my husband work in our factory [*fábrica*] to run the machines that make the textiles. But the men aren't there all day. They take pieces home, where their wives help them [finish the textiles]. They like it because they can work at home; they don't have to be here, away from home, all day. The men come most mornings [to the production site] to return the finished pieces from the day before. They run the machines for a while, when they're working [when the machines are functioning], and then, they take new pieces home to work on. They get paid per finished item. [Translated by author].

Thus, while Emilia and her husband do not directly employ women at their production site, they indirectly employ the wives of the men who work at their production site. Therefore, although she only counted four male workers plus her husband, there are at least ten men and women total who are involved in producing textiles for this site. Men run the machinated hand weaving looms at Emilia's production site, which is common throughout Peguche, earning them the continued identity of weavers. While men are more likely to run machinated hand weaving machines, women are generally involved in – or entirely responsible for – the finishing steps of textiles. Trimming, hemming, mending, washing, fluffing, and fulling are important steps in finishing textiles. If these steps are not completed, textiles will fetch much lower prices because they will appear rough and unfinished. Therefore, most vendors are not willing to sell pieces that have not undergone the finishing steps, highlighting the importance of this labor for vending. Yet, in the production process, weaving is highlighted both by locals and in the literature as the pinnacle of skilled work, erasing the importance of finishing work. Thus, women's textile craft production labor is invisibilized. Given the

scale of machinated hand weaving production, these finishing steps are done by hand, usually by women in their own homes. While men's weaving work operating machinated hand weaving technology is more visible at production sites, women's finishing work is less visible as it is completed at home. In a setting where work done by hand is often more highly valued by Otavaleños and tourists alike, it is odd that the finishing work, which is done by hand, is deemed less significant than the weaving, even when the weaving work is aided by a machinated loom. Further, couples are paid for their work based on the number of completed pieces, which are not considered complete until they have undergone the finishing process. Thus, I argue that women play an important role in textile production, even when they are not the weavers, and even when they are not directly employed by production sites. Yet, the significance of this work is invisibilized in the way in which craft production is described by Otavalans and in the literature.

To keep their production site running, machines must be maintained frequently. Emilia told me, "They have to maintenance the machinated looms every two weeks because of heavy use," which means that one machinated hand weaving loom is generally out of commission at any given time [translated by author]. She explained, "If they aren't kept up and serviced all the time, then they will really break, and have a big problem" [translated by author]. Normal wear and tear can lead to broken parts that can take a long time to replace because of the long wait time for them to come in. Sometimes machines can have stopgap fixes to keep them running temporarily, but it is more common that they have to shut down the machine and wait for it to be properly fixed. Thus, although some Otavalan vendors believe machinated hand weaving is too simplified to be deemed work, producers must be knowledgeable in servicing machines for temporary fixes and in deciding when the issue is large enough to halt production on a machine, calling in outside help to avoid permanently damaging expensive equipment.

Emilia continually had issues with one or more of her machinated looms throughout the summer of 2018, which led to diminished production, depleted stock, and ultimately caused Emilia and her husband to purchase a fifth machinated hand weaving loom. After a number of stopgap fixes, waiting for parts, and attempting to return all machines to proper production levels, Emilia's stock was so low that it dominated our discussion one day in September 2018. Emilia lamented,

One machine [machinated loom] wasn't running properly for the past week, so we had to shut it down completely and properly fix it! It's terrible timing! Look, [gesturing to her nearly empty stall]! I'm almost out of every size and color [of both the pullover and hooded zip-up styles of sweater]! And now the machine can't run at all. We need to make more, not less!" [Translated by author].

I had never seen her inventory so low. Her mood was exacerbated by the other vendors who kept visiting her stall and asking about production and stock. The vendors were understandably disappointed, since they rely on her production to keep their inventory in good shape. This further upset Emilia because her relationship with vendors is incredibly important to her both as a vendor/supplier and also personally, to feel a sense of belonging in her indigenous community. She continued, "We need more [products]. Everyone asks. They need more. I know we need more. But what we really need is another machine! But how can we afford to buy another one?" [translated by author]. Emilia worried that without inventory to sell to vendors, she would not make enough money to afford another machinated hand weaving loom, as well as the cost of maintenance for the machinated looms she already had at her production site. She felt trapped, unable to meet production demand and unable to afford the additional equipment that would allow her to meet the demand. While she was ultimately able to afford a fifth machinated loom, her situation highlights the pressures that producers face.

Emilia described her situation as the owner of a production site, while highlighting the flexibility of work for the male workers she employed, who could often work from home. Yet, others described this work as unstable and dangerous. Husband and wife Karla and Alejandro are in their thirties and are vendors in the Plaza de Ponchos. They had a baby girl in 2018, which altered Karla's ability to vend. Karla would vend most days but had to stay home when the baby was sick and due to poor weather, out of concern for the baby's health. Alejandro joined her in the market on Saturdays and in the evenings to tear down the stall. During the week, he worked "at a small workshop (*taller*) owned by his cousin" [translated by author]. Notice that Emilia described her larger production site as a *fábrica* [factory] above, while Alejandro described the smaller production site as a *taller* [workshop]. These terms are commonly used among producers and vendors in Otavalo in this way to distinguish the size of the

production site. From previous jobs, Alejandro knows how to make jeans, jackets, and machine embroider items with computer programs, but at the workshop in 2017-2018, he was only making blouses. He described his work: “There’s no regular work schedule. It’s kind of a pain. It depends on what the workshop needs in that moment, so it’s always changing” [translated by author]. As is common with this type of labor, he is paid per finished piece. Because demand fluctuates, both his work schedule and pay were unstable. He explained, “Sometimes, they want me to come, but I won’t go if they only need two shirts. It’s not worth it. It costs me more [in time and transportation fees] than I’d make. So, I tell them I’m busy with the baby or Karla needs me in the market. When I’m not working in the *taller*, I work around the home, or I come help in the market” [translated by author]. Alejandro was also taking education courses at the time and wished to take more courses to improve his English and Kichwa language skills. Thus, while his employment allowed him flexibility to meet various responsibilities and interests, both Karla and Alejandro worried that the work was unstable and could not support their growing family.

While Alejandro was “bored that they only have me making blouses, when I know how to make other things” [translated by author], his mother-in-law, Lucia, was happy he was machine embroidering blouses, rather than producing textiles on machinated hand weaving looms. Lucia is the primary vendor for her household and is no longer involved in producing portable handmade crafts because of her health. One day, when I approached Lucia’s stall, she and her neighboring vendor, Alicia, were discussing various men that they had heard about who were injured from machinated hand weaving technology. Both women are middle-aged vendors who are well established in the market. Lucia exclaimed, “Did you hear? He lost three fingers to the machine! He was compensated for it, but still. His fingers!” [translated by author]. Alicia encouraged her to tell the story, saying things like, “Oh, yes. That happens. I’ve heard about that. It’s awful!” [translated by author]. Lucia continued, “He’s not alone. Another man lost his thumb. His thumb! That’s worse than fingers. He needs his thumb for everything. He was compensated, too, and they valued his thumb as more than the fingers” [he received more money for the loss of his thumb] [translated by author]. When Alicia exclaimed, “It’s dangerous!,” Lucia countered, “I heard it was his fault, though. The Ministerio de

Trabajo [Ministry of Work] and the Centro de Mediación [Mediation Center] were involved. That's not a good sign. He should've been more careful. He's lucky they paid him" [translated by author]. Softening, she looked at me and added, "But they pay for an accident only once. A man loses fingers, and they're gone forever! How's he supposed to work after that? It's dangerous work. I don't like it. I don't like those big machines. I tell my kids, 'The smaller machines are better. [Machine] embroidery [is better] instead [of machinated hand weaving]'" [translated by author]. Thus, Lucia and Alicia perceived machinated hand weaving technology to be dangerous and discouraged their family members from that type of production.

Otavalans have different opinions about machinated hand weaving, as is evidenced by interview responses and informal conversations outlined above. Opinions will likely continue to shift, as craft production shifts to more machinated hand weaving and more imported, mass-produced items. Yet, weaving continues to be linked with men's work, both among Otavaleños' descriptions and in the literature about Otavalan crafts. This hierarchy of craft production that spotlights weaving invisibilizes women's labor, actively erasing their contributions to craft production – labor which is often done by hand – even in light of challenges to the notion of identity and authenticity in craft production.

3.4 Situating This Project in the Literature

My dissertation research builds on work that questions homogenous indigenous communities (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999, 2009) by investigating daily life, which involves conflicts and tensions between gendered labor. In an effort to avoid upholding the dichotomy between men and women, I also remained vigilant for divisions among women. There are hierarchies among women based on age or marital status, with older, married women having more power and authority than younger, unmarried women. I asked which women were craft producers and why and what roles various women filled in craft production and distribution.

My research has shown that women are more likely to become craft producers when men are absent from the household. Given the importance of extended kinship among Otavalans, it seems likely that a household could utilize their extended kinship

network to seek male labor, if this were absolutely necessary to complete gendered tasks. Instead, I found that women are capable of weaving, depending on the circumstance, although the existing body of literature is unclear on how easily a woman can fulfill the “male” role of weaving and what the social consequences of women weaving are. I build on the work of Canessa, who writes about gender, race, and ethnicity in Bolivia: “gender is performed within cultural systems that place strong restrictions on what is acceptable. So even though it is accepted in Wila K’jarka that men will cook and women will plow, this is only when there is no person of the relevant gender who can do that job” (2012:145-146). Thus, gendered labor is reinforced and contested through the ways in which individuals perform gender through labor. In regard to the divisions among women, I argue that poorer and older women may be more likely to weave textiles because they are in more precarious positions and may have learned to weave from family members out of necessity, while engagement in the production of other crafts may have different trends. Thus, this dissertation adds to the existing body of literature on gender in Latin America by highlighting performativity as a lens to better understand contemporary indigenous conceptions of gender and gendered labor.

CHAPTER 4. CRAFTS AND VALORIZATION

Growing up in rural Appalachia, I was always fascinated by the objects around me and the stories they told. I live in a region influenced by the Pennsylvania Dutch, where antiques and handmade items are plentiful; living 20 miles from the Seneca Nation and a few hours from several Amish communities, there was no shortage of old items and handicrafts that have been passed down through generations or gifted their way from friend to friend. I always felt these older items and handicrafts were more interesting in the stories they told than anything I could find at a big box store. Over time, I realized that one reason crafts are important is that they may be deemed representative of a culture – with production techniques and the symbolism of motifs or the production process often passed down from one generation to the next via informal learning. Salazar writes, “sociocultural values are attached to heritage because it holds meaning for people or social groups due to its age, beauty, artistry, or association with a significant person or event or (otherwise) contributes to sociocultural affiliation and identification” (Lyon and Wells 2012:24). In other words, there is a web of cultural information connected to the production and distribution of crafts. By looking at the production and distribution of crafts, we can learn about gender conceptualizations and gendered labor within cultures and across time. Another reason crafts are important is their history as communication devices for cultures without written languages. Often, designs represented important ideas or relayed legends, myths, or important events. Crafts are valuable far beyond their price tag, and the valorization of crafts has in part facilitated my study of gendered labor, identity, and indigeneity in Otavalo.

At their simplest, studies of crafts view them as goods that provide information about the people who produce them as well as those who consume them (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). By analyzing the relationships surrounding the production and consumption of crafts, we can learn about the meanings with which they are imbued and the ways in which they are valued: “Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges” (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:xv). Crafts may serve to create boundaries between different groups of people (ex: craft specialization is often a marker of identifying different ethnic groups), but they may also serve to connect people (ex:

through relationship of joint production or of gifting). Exchange and use of objects can be seen as creating value beyond a simple market price (Appadurai 1992; Douglas and Isherwood 1996). In this chapter, I look first at the broad relationships between crafts and the state, ethnicity, class, and gender, before analyzing the valorization of Otavalan textiles as global commodities, art objects, organizing kin and household relations, social capital, and the notion of Otavalan weaving as ‘timeless and authentic.’

4.1 Crafts and the State

Crafts made by ethnic groups are often considered cultural property. Indigenous cultural property is linked to identity and sovereignty, and ideas about ownership are impacted by state ideas as well as influences of globalization. Certain crafts are perceived as representing the state (or sometimes the nation), such that the government supports those crafts and craft producers. This is often accomplished through promotions of tourism that associate ethnic groups as craft producers with cultural heritage sites or that highlight craft markets as ‘must-see’ sites of national identity by featuring images of craft producers and their products on websites or in advertisements and brochures. Images of indigenous peoples prove particularly effective in highlighting the state as distinctive from other locations, especially in Latin America: “Spectacles of ‘Indian’ arts and crafts, music, dance, rituals, costume, and mythology have played an important role in constructing the ‘soul’ of the nation” (Shlossberg 2015:11). The logic is that the state can entice tourists by highlighting these craft producers and will benefit financially from the money tourists spend on not only crafts but also on food, lodging, and cultural excursions. States recovering from violent pasts find this to be a particularly useful strategy of rebuilding national identity as a safe but exotic/enticing site for tourist consumption: “As Soper states, ‘In the production of tourism, the use of historic symbols, signs, and topics form a discourse that characterizes a nation and can play an active role in nation building’” (Lyon and Wells 2012:8; Babb 2011). Tours make states exotic and cater to ideas of the Other, but these packaged experiences make sites feel safe and comfortable for tourists to explore (Wood 2008).



Figure 4.1 Otavalan bag supporting the slogan from the national tourist campaign “Ecuador: ama la vida.” [Author photo]

Recently, the Ecuadorian government has launched national campaigns that promote tourism, and included slogans such as “Ecuador: ama la vida” [translated by author: “Ecuador: love life”] and “Ecuador es todo lo que necesitas” [translated by author: “Ecuador is all you need”], which they simultaneously launched in English as “All you need is Ecuador – travel.” These campaigns featured Otavalans, their textiles, and the Plaza de Ponchos. Otavalans responded by featuring these slogans on their bags, shirts, and other crafts (See Figures 4.1, 4.2). While the government spent a great deal on these campaigns, the state also benefitted from increased tourism and the revenue that brings. In highlighting Otavalans as “model Indians,” the state looks progressive and multicultural, even as it defunds multicultural education programs that incorporated indigenous languages and worldviews in public classrooms (Martínez Novo 2013, 2014) and places limits on indigenous rights (Martínez Novo 2021). Thus, the valorization of Otavalan textiles as exemplars of indigeneity benefits Ecuador in the way that other states perceive them as progressive or multicultural. This view is also used to shame other Ecuadorian indigenous groups, blaming them for their ‘failures’ to achieve their potential, without offering structural support. To the extent that this view provides social

capital and increases tourism, Otavalans may benefit, but it also places increased pressure on them to fulfill this idealized role of indigeneity as “model Indians.”



Figure 4.2 The logo and slogan were featured on governmental buildings, such as this building in a public park in Ibarra, Ecuador. [Author photo]

This notion of state representation and claiming of crafts is both supported and challenged by artisans who travel abroad to sell their crafts. Vendors abroad may represent their home state in ways that the government can use these artisans as examples of their engagement with the global market, but artisans sometimes become enmeshed in transnational networks that call into question the ability of a single state to claim their crafts. For many, traveling abroad is about more than finding new work, as sending remittances home or returning home with new skills becomes motivations for transnational labor fields (Fouon and Glick-Schiller 2001). Wood (2008) explained how he observed Zapotec alumni of the bracero program return home to Mexico with the experience of working with and for U.S. businesses, where they had also been exposed to

U.S. consumer tastes. These experiences can help Zapotec weavers navigate international influences in textile designs. For instance, both Zapotec and Otavalan weavers have learned that Navajo designs are popular with tourists, who frequently and happily purchase these textiles, quickly dismissing potential issues of authenticity (Wood 2008:92; Meisch 2002). In this case, tourists seem to lump Navajo, Zapotec, and Otavalans together as an indistinguishable indigenous Other, all of whom produce beautiful – and apparently interchangeable – textiles. In fact, tourists may be primed to expect all native peoples around the world to be interchangeable in their nativeness: “The ideological package that was sold to tourists who came to states with large indigenous populations is based on a homogenized image of ‘Indian culture’ and the material remains of that culture that can be visited or purchased and taken home” (Stephen 2005:164). For others, staying at home and producing crafts, rather than working for a large business or migrating abroad to find labor can be a form of economic resistance (Hansen, Little, and Milgram 2013).

4.2 Crafts and Ethnicity

Craft specialization is often a marker of identifying different ethnic groups. For example, different groups in Ecuador are known for their expertise with certain mediums (ex: wood, bamboo, wool, leather, reeds, etc.) to produce certain objects (ex: figurines, hats, belts, bags, clothing, etc.) (Meisch 2002:33). Indigenous populations are often “imagined and gifted with artistic and creative souls,” such that their opportunities for forms of economic engagement other than craft production are often limited (Shlossberg 2015:43). Some groups are increasing their craft production as tourist markets allow for increased consumers, while others are abandoning craft production for other occupations that may offer more steady income. Noting that the number of people who continue to weave is declining in Peru, Zorn observed that many still choose to weave for a variety of reasons: “because producers can obtain basic materials without spending money, because handwoven cloth still fulfills many of its economic, communicative and symbolic roles, and because cloth can provide a significant source of income in the impoverished Andes” (Zorn 2004:10). Textiles have a long history in the Andes as “communicative and symbolic” items (Zorn 2004:10), and this legacy continues today for many indigenous

peoples living in the highlands. Thus, some groups continue to produce crafts as a way of claiming and maintaining their ethnic identities.

4.2.1 Authenticity and Tourists' Expectations

There are several studies focusing on Western perceptions of indigenous-made art and the influence that Westerners have on the production of indigenous-made handicrafts (Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Berlo and Phillips 1998). For example, handicrafts are often marketed as “ethnic or tourist art” and valued in terms of “authenticity” (Phillips and Steiner 1999; Berlo and Phillips 1998). Rather than simply being considered art, handicrafts made by “cultural Others have been appropriated primarily into two of these categories: the artifact or ethnographic specimen and the work of art” (Phillips and Steiner 1999:3). The provenance of the piece and ethnicity of the artisan are emphasized more than the characteristics or indigenous significance of the handicraft (Berlo and Phillips 1998). Crafts produced by indigenous peoples and ethnic groups have been devalued because they sell “tourist art,” which is considered “less authentic” than items made for local consumption (Phillips and Steiner 1999; Berlo and Phillips 1998). This way of viewing handicrafts often leads to marketing that draws upon stereotypes pertaining to the ethnicities of the artisans, while in effect encouraging mass-produced items and faster production techniques to ensure higher quantities of goods that can be readily sold at lower prices, since the items have been devalued simply by viewing them as “tourist art” or “crafts,” rather than artisan items. Thus, producers are trapped in a paradox: a small segment of consumers desires artisan crafts made with traditional materials and production techniques, but the majority of tourists will not pay the higher prices necessary for these items. Therefore, producers are often forced to choose the artisan identity and survive on few high ticket sales, or mass produce items to survive on many low ticket sales. Either way, producers often feel they must forfeit something with both their identity and livelihood at stake.

In some regard, tourists have forced indigenous peoples to maintain an outdated image of indigenous identity in order to be recognized as indigenous and “authentic,” permitting them to make sales in tourist markets as recognizable unchanging relics (Shlossberg 2015). Tourist markets often become sites where stereotypes are reinforced:

“Tourism becomes synonymous with representation because a certain image must be created and marketed” (Figuroa, Goodwin, and Wells 2012:50). Indigenous artisans must look “traditional and authentic and humble” (Shlossberg 2015:4); when vendors do not fulfill these ideas, they are less likely to make a sale because consumers perceive them as ‘inauthentic’ and only seeking to make a profit. These judgments of authenticity or disdain of profit-seeking seem to apply exclusively to indigenous peoples and no other populations involved in sales. Concepts of authenticity and value are dependent upon the market, and in particular, upon tourists’ preferences as consumers (Shlossberg 2015:36). For craft vendors, “much of their success is predicated upon their abilities to attune themselves to tourists’ desires to have unique and personal encounters rather than just generic commercial transactions” (Huberman 2012:91). In order to combat issues of perceived inauthenticity, Zapotec weavers have been observed to strategically present themselves by focusing on tradition, authenticity (here meaning unchanging), “the ‘pre-industrial’ nature of indigenous Mexican artisans,” and the production as not being commercial in nature (Wood 2008:109). Thus, artisans may highlight aspects of their indigeneity to meet tourists’ ideas about authenticity in order to make sales.

4.2.2 Fair Trade and Consumers’ Expectations

What consumers know or feel about a place – including stereotypes – can often be more significant than their knowledge about specific products when making purchasing decisions (Knight and Calantone 2000:129). Over the past thirty years, Alternative Trading Organizations or Fair Trade have become popular avenues for consumers in the Global North to purchase crafts and food that is – or at least claims to be – produced and compensated for in a more equitable manner than traditional capitalist commodities and often includes an emphasis on sustainability (Littrell and Dickson 2010; Lyon 2011; Grimes and Milgram 2000). Fair Trade certification can offer a comparative advantage for artisans that can be economically beneficial for those involved in the programs (Hassoun 2012), although several authors contest whether Fair Trade is ultimately beneficial to artisans around the globe (Haight and Henderson 2010; Randall 2005).

Fair Trade items often feature tags or cards that provide the location of origin, a description of the handicraft, and information about the craft producer, recognizing that

an integral part of the Fair Trade shopping experience is awareness of who and where one's money benefits, highlighting "the kind of 'story' that fairly traded crafts can tell" (Marston 2013:163). Fair Trade items are generally more expensive than their non-Fair Trade counterparts, but some consumers are willing to spend more on certified crafts because they feel they can make a social impact by how they spend their money, knowing that part of the profits from the sale go directly to the artisans. One of the fairest forms of trade could occur in international markets, where consumers have the opportunity to pay vendors, and sometimes producer-vendors, directly. These transactions occur without a price markup to compensate middlemen, so consumers could be confident that 100% of the money they exchange goes directly to the pocket of the vendor from whom they purchased goods. Ironically, tourists who travel abroad and purchase handmade crafts from artisans in foreign markets tend to seek the lowest price for crafts, even though their money is being directly paid to the producer without organizations serving as middlemen to undermine the fairest transaction possible. This paradox highlights the attitudes of different consumers and their expectations about quality, price, the methods of craft production, and the ways in which craft production can be viewed as integral to a group's ethnicity (Lyon and Wells 2012). Consumers who purchase Fair Trade items likely have different attitudes and expectations from consumers who purchase items in foreign tourist markets (See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of different types of consumers). Thus, shoppers in the U.S. are willing to pay more for foreign and/or indigenous made crafts at boutiques and specialty shops than shoppers purchasing the same crafts directly from vendors and producers in foreign markets. Further, this paradox highlights that vendors interact with different types of consumers, and must be adept and navigating different kinds of relationships quickly.

Fair Trade is based on the principle of equitable consumption, usually centered around the core beliefs of fair compensation for labor and the concept sustainability, with different interpretations of sustainability; for Fair Trade crafts, 'sustainability' usually refers to smaller scale production that is better able to be maintained for both producers and consumers. Often, Fair Trade items are produced with more labor-intensive production techniques – many of which are considered traditional techniques because they would have been used historically – because producers' labor will be fairly

compensated. These labor-intensive production techniques often allow producers to use natural fibers and dyeing processes, as these are also often labor-intensive and time-consuming, but will be fairly compensated under Fair Trade certified organizations and programs. While Otavalan crafts are not Fair Trade certified and there is no current effort to obtain official certification, one group in Kentucky who partners with Otavalan vendors described their relationship as “in the spirit of fair trade” (not capitalized here to highlight the lack of official certification and oversight). Thus, the emphasis for not only this partnership but for consumers interested in purchasing indigenous made crafts is on equitable consumption rather than Fair Trade certification. Further, it is common for U.S.-based groups, especially religious organizations, to establish relationships and partnerships “in the spirit of fair trade” with foreign vendors and producers. Over the years, I have personally encountered several groups who had relationships with Otavalan vendors and producers. This underscores how significant perceptions and emotional impact are for consumers in terms of equitable consumption.

One store in Otavalo, Ecuador – Entia Gallery – was unique in its efforts to be recognized as a “Fair Trade Shop,” as indicated by their flier (See Figure 4.3). Entia Gallery is located in a distinctive white building on one of the roads lining the block that is the Plaza de Ponchos, although it previously operated out of the owners’ home in a different part of Otavalo. The owners of Entia Gallery own the entire building, which also houses a coffee shop, a brewpub, and Airbnb, all of which cater to Americans and Europeans. The building was conveniently located for me to take periodic breaks from conducting research in the Plaza de Ponchos, and the coffee shop served as an excellent workspace during the frequent occasions that my homestay experienced power outages and internet failures. Over the months of my fieldwork, I developed a friendship with the owners.

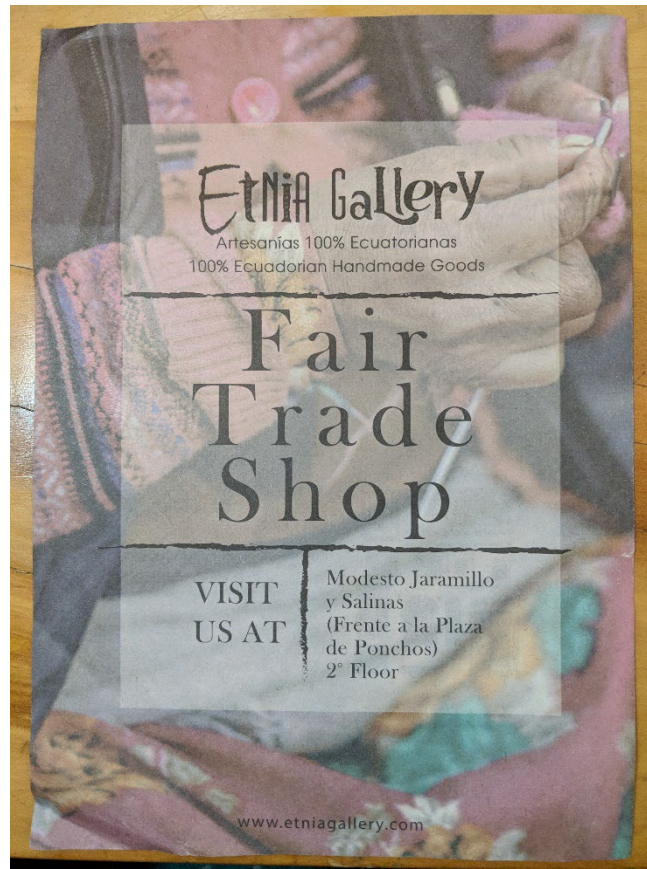


Figure 4.3 Paper flier advertising the store Etnia Gallery as a “Fair Trade Shop” in a mixture of English and Spanish. [Author photo]

The Spanish word “etnia” translates to “ethnicity” in English, but the shop’s focus is more on craftsmanship than ethnic affiliation, as most of the items are made by mestizo producers. While speaking with the owners and operators of the shop, they told me they envisioned their shop as a fusion of traditional Ecuadorian crafts with a French/European twist, as a way to “respect history while pushing it forward” [translated by author]. The owners are a mestizo family who have previously lived in France and were inspired by European fashion. The owners are also artisan producers who handmake woven clothing and small crocheted figurines, using natural fibers like wool and alpaca. They had partnered with other Ecuadorian artisans, most of whom were in the Andes region, when they saw the opportunity to fill a niche market, catering to consumers who wanted handicrafts that were handmade from natural materials and were willing to pay accordingly. Still, they prided themselves on offering prices that were fair to consumers, while providing fair wages to artisan producers. The owners speak Spanish and French

but do not speak English. During my visits, they would ask me what I thought of the prices, and they asked me to question shoppers in the store about the prices and their overall impression of the quality of the products and of the shopping experience. Although they are situated on the Plaza de Ponchos and their second story location provides an excellent view of the market, their products are quite different than what one finds in the tourist market. The prices were certainly higher, but the products were also made with different fibers and production techniques. The shop also emulated a boutique feel, with fewer items than the crowded Plaza de Ponchos.

Although their flier advertises Etnia Gallery as a “Fair Trade Shop,” the shop is more “in the spirit of fair trade” than Fair Trade certified. Because the owners are artisan producers who have personally established relationships with other Ecuadorian artisan producers, they embody the ideals of equitable consumption without the oversight of Fair Trade organizations. Some of the items in the store featured tags or accompanying paperwork that provided a description of the handicraft and information about the craft producer, emphasizing the story of the craft and fostering an emotional connection between the consumer and producer, not dissimilar to Fair Trade shopping experiences (See Figure 4.4). These labels often featured prices, further distinguishing them from the unmarked crafts for sale in the Plaza de Ponchos. However, of the crafts and artisans featured in Etnia Gallery, I only personally observed one brand that overtly claimed to be Fair Trade: Made by Minga.



Figure 4.4 Some of the items in Etnia Gallery featured tags highlighting the story of the craft and producer, signaling a deeper significance of these handicrafts to consumers. [Author photo]

In 2018, Etnia Gallery featured some bags from the Made by Minga brand. Each of these bags were labeled with tags that described them as “fairtrade bags” and highlighted the use of natural fibers and dyes, while crediting the artisan producer by name (See Figures 4.5). At the time, the store contained no additional signage about the brand. Made by Minga’s website features a short “About Us” section at the bottom of every page, which reads: “At Minga, we partner with multi-generational artisan groups in Ecuador to design and create accessories that uphold sustainability while celebrating heritage craftsmanship and art” (Made by Minga). They elaborate under the “Our Process” page, writing “We honor not only the craft but the person behind it - their livelihood and wellbeing” (Our Process). Consumers can see how the brand honors producers, since each piece lists the specific woman who produced it. Despite this individual recognition, no name of an actual ethnic or indigenous group is used to

describe the producers on a collective level, either on the individual product tags or on the website. Under “The Artisans” webpage, it reads: “We collaborate with “The Floras de Choco”, a group of women living in the cloudforest of Intag, Ecuador” (The Artisans). However, this is not a known name for a group of people (like how Otavalan refers to a well-known group of people). Rather, Chocó is a tropical forest region known for its biodiversity. Further, the website does not explain whether these women are indigenous women or mestizo women, but those pictured do not possess any of the typical visible boundary markers of Andean indigenous women in the form of dress, hairstyle, or adornment.



Figure 4.5 The inside (left) and outside (right) of a folded shopping tag on a *shigra* inspired bag at Etnia Gallery. This is a Made by Minga brand bag, described here as “fairtrade bags handwoven from cactus dyed with plants” that was “made in Ecuador by [an artisan named] Merci.” [Author photos]

The Made by Minga website features two bag styles inspired by the famous *shigra* style bag – cylindrical open-top bags/purses with knotted handles – but both use

different names. *Shigra* bags are a famous style and craft associated with Ecuadorian production. The Made by Minga “ñaña – bucket bag” derives its name from the Kichwa word for sister, while the Made by Minga “transito – mini backpack” derives its name from the Spanish word for travel [translated by author] (Artisan-Made Bags). However, neither of these bags are accompanied by translations or explanations on the website or product tag. Both of these styles appear inspired by *shigra* bags in their shape (See Figure 6.1 for a traditional *shigra* bag), closure style, and use of cabuya plant fibers, which the owners of Etnia Gallery confirmed. However, these Made by Minga bags differ in their incorporation of leather elements, which aligns with Etnia Gallery’s focus on hybrid crafts. While the Made by Minga product tag and website text reference “ethically sourced” materials and “artisan partners,” there is no discussion of the historically significant bag that almost certainly served as inspiration for the brands’ styles (Artisan-Made Bags). The “transito – mini backpack” was priced at \$80 when I photographed it at the Etnia Gallery shop in Otavalo in 2018; in 2022, it is listed at \$160 on Made by Minga’s website. While it is possible that the prices of these bags have increased over the years, the extreme difference in price suggests to me that the brand uses differential pricing, depending on the market (i.e., a shop in Ecuador has a lower price than a website accessed in the U.S.). No explanation of how artisans are paid is provided that would explain the differential pricing. This suggests to me that the brand may cater to different consumers in different markets.

Nowhere on the Made by Minga website does it list what Trade Fair certifications they have, have applied for, or formerly possessed. Thus, it appears that this brand is more “in the spirit of fair trade,” but its vague reference to “fairtrade bags” could easily dupe consumers who are not well-educated in the Fair Trade certification process or who do not take the time to search for specific certifications. Everything on their product tags and website indicates that this brand strives to promote equitable consumption, but their differential pricing and lack of oversight that would be provided by official Fair Trade certification places more responsibility on the consumer to determine just how equitable their consumption truly is. I have focused on Etnia Gallery and Made by Minga, as these are the only shop and brand of which I am aware to use the term Fair Trade in a way that implies certification, rather than ethical consumption “in the spirit of fair trade.”

However, this shop and brand cater to different consumers than those who visit the Plaza de Ponchos, where the fairest form of trade could occur by paying vendors and producers directly, but tourists usually prefer to purchase cheap items and haggle for the lowest prices possible. These differing consumer expectations highlight the ways in which crafts are valorized differently by various shoppers, especially in regard to equitable consumption.

4.3 Crafts and Class

Craft production is often linked to class and education; people of lower social class are less likely to obtain higher education that will prepare them for more lucrative work (Grimes and Milgram 2000; Stephen 1997). Some partake in craft production for economic motivations (Grimes and Milgram 2000:3; Zorn 2004:10), while others are motivated to engage in this work because of familial heritage or ethnic traditions (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Wood 2008) and the prestige associated with being artisans, such as Otavalan weavers who are well-known for quality textiles (Meisch 2002; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). However, it is difficult to attribute why artisans engage in craft production to a single cause. Scrase (2003) describes craft production as a form of pride and resistance that pairs economics and tradition as generally being the main motivations for ethnic groups who produce crafts.

Some authors have challenged the idea that craft production is associated with lower social class, providing examples of indigenous populations who have improved their socioeconomic standing through craft production and strategic vending (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 2002; Tassi 2016). Nico Tassi (2016) has explored the ways in which indigenous values and practices have been incorporated into the Aymara's engagement with global capitalism, which differs from Marxist predictions that capitalism will subsume native economies. He demonstrates how their economic success has strengthened communities and reinforced traditional beliefs, rather than resulting in homogenization or Westernization. Their success has also confronted racist ideas about the socioeconomic structure of Bolivia, as some Aymaras attain levels of wealth and power previously restricted to mestizos and whites. Tassi also points out that Aymaras have been fighting for these sociopolitical changes for years, although they were

popularized when Evo Morales was elected president. As he states, Morales became the symbol for the indigenous movement in Bolivia (Tassi 2016:30), but it was still a ground-up process, enabled in part by Aymara economic success. Thus, through their involvement in craft production and distribution, Aymaras in Bolivia were gaining economic wealth that has been translated into power and prestige (Tassi 2016).

Otavalans in Ecuador have taken a similar trajectory, in that their economic success has translated into social status (Meisch 2002; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). A more detailed discussion of the different socioeconomic levels of Otavalans and their involvement with crafts can be found below. Therefore, craft production is not inherently synonymous with lower social class, even as many craft producers turn to crafts as one of the few opportunities for employment available and as it proves difficult for many to achieve social mobility because of the fickle nature of tourists' consumption of crafts.

4.4 Crafts and Gender

Craft production is often associated with women, since production can be done in the household, while tending to the home and children (Scrase 2003; Stephen 1997; Littrell and Dickson 2010). While this can be a stereotypical view of gender expectations and should be challenged rather than simply accepted as being true everywhere, especially in the way it homogenizes 'women' into a single category (Tice 1995), there are cases where craft production is one of the few forms in which women can engage with the global economy and fulfill other needs. For instance, women making Fair Trade textiles in India cited the need to provide for their families by working from home as their motivation for producing crafts (Littrell and Dickson 2010). While there are certainly other opportunities for employment in India, producing crafts from home is the best choice for some women: "Without additional household help or affordable childcare, these women are simply not free to leave their homes for the long periods of time that would be demanded by other forms of employment" (Littrell and Dickson 2010:87). It has been noted that Zapotec women in Oaxaca began to weave when men left during the bracero programs, and these women and their daughters have increasingly become weavers for economic survival (Stephen 2005). Yet, despite their involvement in craft production, women are often considered helpers rather than craft producers, thus

devaluing their labor. This occurs because there is a disconnect between work performed by women and what is considered to be work in many cultures: “women in many complex societies act as craft production specialists, but there is a strong tendency to consider craft production as something else if women do it” (Clark 2003:13). Yet, craft production is not always considered ‘women’s work.’

Among craft producers throughout Latin America, there are often gendered divisions of labor in terms of who produces crafts, who is involved in the various stages of production, and who sells crafts. In Taquile, on Lake Titicaca, Peru, Zorn noted gendered distinctions: men and women weave different kinds of textiles, and men sell them (Zorn 2004:16). Among the Zapotec in Mexico, Wood observed a gendered division of labor in textile production: women are responsible for carding, washing, and selling textiles, while men dye and weave the textiles (Wood 2008). For Incan textile producers of the past, both men and women could be involved in shearing, washing, spinning, winding, skeining, plying, dyeing, warping, weaving, and finishing; however, weaving was traditionally done by women (Callañaupa Alvarez 2007:48-60). In general, contemporary highland Peruvians still maintain these divisions in craft production (Callañaupa Alvarez 2007). Among the Kuna people in Panama, Tice observed that “sewing *molas* [Kuna indigenous women’s clothing] is a ‘woman’s’ task whether performed by a biological woman or a man who is socially defined as womanlike” (Tice 1995:75). Further, Tice described how Kuna men and women sell *molas*, but men tend to sell *molas* in larger cities and markets that fetch higher prices (Tice 1995). In many Latin American cultures, gender identities are linked to gendered labor, such that repetition and enactment (or “processes and activities” Canessa 2012:126) define one’s gender often more than their biology or dress. Thus, analyzing gendered labor in craft production can be helpful in understanding concepts of gender within a culture.

Tourists’ expectations can be important in shaping male and female craft producers’ identity performances: “Cultural tourism is a highly competitive industry and often relies on gendered images of women. Therefore, while it is critical to explore the gendered dimensions of tourist market participation, this is especially true when examining cultural tourism and the artisan markets that cater to foreign visitors” (Lyon and Wells 2012:14). Because women are considered to be “more Indian” (de la Cadena

1995) and are more likely to wear *traje* (indigenous clothing), female indigenous vendors are more readily recognized by tourists as Other (Canessa 2012; Shlossberg 2015; Little 2004; Meisch 2002; Tice 1995). In locations where women selling crafts is considered appropriate, the visibly different appearance of female vendors is equally important as their social skills when it comes to making sales. Yet, selling items is often devalued as a form of labor because it is perceived as simple, and not physically or mentally demanding (de la Cadena 1995:334); this is especially the case when women are the vendors.

4.5 Valorization of Otavalan Textiles

There are different ways to value Otavalan textiles, in addition to the market price they fetch. Textiles may be valorized as global commodities, art objects, a means of organizing kin and household relations, social capital, or as upholding the view of Otavalans as “model Indians” (Meisch 2002). These different ways of creating value benefit different parties, as outlined below.

4.5.1 Otavalan Textiles as Global Commodities

As early as the sixteenth century, “Otavalos were producing not only traditional textiles but nontraditional textiles for outsiders, a pattern which still obtains” (Meisch 2002:21). It is important to note that Otavalans have a long history of textiles as a form of syncretism, where they incorporate designs, materials, and weaving techniques into their textiles – especially those made for non-indigenous, non-locals. Otavalans have borrowed styles, motifs, and techniques from the Inca, from the Spanish, and most recently, from the Navajo. Household production units weave what they know will sell in order to provide for their families. This may mean weaving tapestries in a European fashion for the Spanish Crown at one time and making Navajo design pillow covers at another.

Meisch (2002:53) noted that machinated looms were prohibitively expensive, which prevented families from transitioning away from household production units into larger, more efficient, faster production that could hire outside workers. In my personal research observations this was true when I first visited Otavalo in 2009, however, this is no longer the case. By 2014 and even more so by 2017, most families have forgone time-consuming production techniques – backstrap loom weaving was only witnessed for

presentation purposes, and the whirring of machinated looms for machinated hand weaving can be heard even throughout what are considered to be poorer neighborhoods in Peguche, while floor looms become less common – as production is increasingly becoming mechanized an effort to mass-produce commodities to accommodate tourist demand (See Figures 4.6, 4.7, 4.8). Machinated looms are not only expensive as an original investment, but they also require expensive maintenance over time. In addition, they require a larger amount of space in (or beyond) the household to be dedicated to production in terms of raw materials, goods in process, machine space, and finished goods (compared to backstrap weaving and floor loom weaving) because of the scale of production. Setting aside or gaining that amount of space also requires a large amount of capital. Based on my observations during research trips, machinated looms became the main production technology in Peguche sometime between 2009 and 2014. This may be related to the national policies, like a commodity boom and increased circulation of money in Ecuador after 2010. Under Correa’s administration, lower- and middle-class Ecuadorians had greater access to credit, which could account for the increased accessibility and affordability of machinated looms resulting in the sharp change in technology I observed. This change in weaving technology also reflects local efforts to respond to consumer demand, and the pressure that producers face to increase production and produce goods of consistent quality. Once a few families switched to machinated hand weaving, other producers felt pressure to change their production technology to match those initial adopters of machinated weaving in the scale and efficiency of production. That may also help explain how the technology shift occurred so completely in such a short time period.

As noted in Chapter 1, it is interesting that the mural (See Figure 4.6) features a man weaving – reflecting current expectations of gendered labor – when backstrap weaving was typically done by women. This further invisibilizes women as craft producers, since the site of this mural is intended to educate indigenous and non-indigenous peoples about craft production. In marketing their ethnicity to sell textiles, Otavalans are selling commodities as well as their cultural identity (Brown 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Babb 2011).



Figure 4.6 Mural of an Otavalan man weaving on a backstrap loom at Peguche Wasi Museum in Peguche (2017). This method of weaving is currently only utilized for demonstrations. [Author photo]



Figure 4.7 An Otavalan woman weaving on a floor loom in Peguche (2017). This method of weaving has become so rare that this family is known throughout Peguche and Otavalo. [Author photo]



Figure 4.8 An Otavalan man engaging in machinated hand weaving to produce tablecloths in Peguche. This is the most commonly used method of weaving today.
[Author photo]

Otavaleños have a long history of being engaged in the global market by producing and selling cloth for both internal and external markets and travel to sell their textiles for the past five hundred years, such that a distinct social class of traders called *mindaláes* once existed (Salomon 1986). Many Otavalans have become successful entrepreneurs who use their kinship networks to travel globally to sell textiles, where they observe various consumer trends and demands (Kyle 1999, 2000). Young Otavalan couples often travel to cities such as Madrid, Amsterdam, and New York, in order to take advantage of kinship networks already established in those locations to sell the textiles produced by their family or other producers (Kyle 2000).

By viewing Otavalan textiles as global commodities, Otavalans make sales to customers, meaning they are making profits. However, these are not always large enough sales to actually support families, so some families rely on extended kin networks that have some family members engaged in craft economies, while other members work in shops or businesses. Tourists and consumers value textiles as mementos or souvenirs that allow them to have interactions in other locations, seem ‘worldly,’ and serve as reminders of their experiences abroad. We may see this when someone who has traveled abroad gifts an item to a friend or family member and launches into a story about how they

found the item, the craft producer, the market, the act of bartering, finding room in their suitcase, carrying it back, etc. Textiles become valued in terms of their social life (Appadurai 1992) and the memories they evoke, more than their market price.

The Ecuadorian state also benefits from Otavalan textiles as global commodities because they entice tourists who spend money on food, lodging, travel, and other excursions, as well as on textiles. In fact, Otavalan textiles are so widely known, many tourism businesses use them as a lure to bring tourists to the area. It is quite common for tourists, who have seen nothing other than the Quito airport, to visit the Otavalan market on their way to spend a week in the Galapagos Islands. Textiles are also valuable in financial terms of remittances sent home from Otavalan vendors selling textiles in markets abroad or in other Ecuadorian markets. It is common for vendors to travel to the coast or the Amazon to sell crafts for a few days (especially during holidays) before returning to their regular spots in the Plaza de Ponchos. These remittances often provide discretionary income that Otavaleños still living in the Otavalo area or in Ecuador tend to spend on education and health care expenses (Antón 2010).

4.5.2 Otavalan Textiles as Art Objects

Textiles are generally viewed as utilitarian items rather than art, which means they are often sold for cheaper prices that accommodate tourists' budgets instead of higher prices associated with art collectors. While authors refer to Otavalans as artisans (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 2002), I am unaware of any discussion or consideration in the literature of Otavalan textiles as art. Colloredo-Mansfeld describes Otavalan textiles as "ethnic art" (1999:14) or as "native, ethnic arts" (1999:124), but as I explain below, these labels serve to distinguish crafts from other art forms that are considered more valuable.

Some characteristics of Otavalan textiles are important to understand why they are not viewed as art. Otavalan textiles are small and light enough to fit inside luggage. Because of their bright colors and 'exotic' looking patterns (a point on which many tourists remark), Otavalan textiles seem to be perfect souvenirs for tourists. However, most tourists do not realize that the colors and patterns are intentionally chosen by Otavaleños because they serve tourists' preferences (Tice 1995 has similarly observed

this in Panama). For instance, the bright colors come from man-made acrylic dyes, not natural dyes that might be associated with artisan production techniques that tourists often associate with indigenous people. Even the colors that are used change with fashion trends that typically originate in Europe and the United States. Some of the designs have been featured in Otavalan textiles for centuries, but there are also Otavalan designs that are omitted. One popular trend is the Pre-Columbian motifs that tourists often associate with the nostalgia of noble natives living in communal societies and that fits with their expectations of contemporary indigenous peoples being unchanging relics. Other designs are inspired by Navajo weavings or are even made to order based on customers' wishes. Concepts of authenticity and value are dependent upon the market, and in particular, upon tourists' preferences as consumers (Shlossberg 2015:36; Tice 1995). In their effort to buy "authentic" handicrafts, tourists rely on a false sense of rareness, something many indigenous vendors attempt to provide, while also offering a selection of goods they know their consumers expect (Shlossberg 2015:117).

By being selective about what is considered art, museums and art collectors are able to fetch higher prices for objects that fit into this narrow category. Objects made by indigenous groups, however, are often considered "crafts," rather than "art," or are labeled with qualifiers like "ethnic," "native," or "tourist" art that inherently mark them as Other and as less valuable than what is deemed "art" sans qualifiers (Phillips and Steiner 1999; Berlo and Phillips 1998). There is also an ethnic division in that "art" sans qualifiers generally means Western art forms, like paintings or sculptures, as opposed to what are labeled "ethnic" art forms like textiles, beadwork, or wooden figurines. "Ethnic" art is considered valuable insofar as it is a representation of an ethnic group that can be consumed by outsiders desiring exotic objects, but it is rarely if ever valued in the same way a sculpture or painting by Michelangelo or Monet is valued for its technique and beauty. Conversely, Western art is not generally assumed to be a representation of an entire culture in the way that "ethnic" art is, but rather, is often associated with the individual genius of the artist or school of art.

Because Otavalan textiles are not generally considered to be art, Otavalans are considered craft producers or artisans at best, and not artists (Meisch 2002). Because textiles are considered utilitarian objects, Otavalans miss out on the prestige and social

benefits of their work being considered art, as well as the socioeconomic benefits of the artist identity. Even textiles that are considered art, like Navajo rugs that are highly valued, generally fetch lower prices than Western paintings or sculptures. Despite their renown, Otavalan textiles fetch lower prices than the Navajo work they often replicate. One could argue this is based on different production techniques, but based on my observations, tourists generally know little about materials and production techniques. I would argue that tourists expect items from the Global South to be cheap, and therefore, pay accordingly.

4.5.3 Otavalan Textiles in Organizing Kin and Household Relations

As stated in the introduction, scholars have described Otavalan households as units of production, with tasks ideally broken down along gender lines (Salomon 1981; Salomon 1983; Borchardt de Moreno 1995; Kyle 1999; Kyle 2000; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 1997; Meisch 2002). Men are envisioned as the weavers, while women are described as secondary craft workers who do not weave (Salomon 1981; Salomon 1983; Borchardt de Moreno 1995; Kyle 1999; Kyle 2000; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 1997; Meisch 2002). Women are supposedly restricted from weaving, although their help is welcomed in preparing yarn for weaving and in finishing a product; thus, among Otavalans, the act of weaving is considered male domain. Yet, it should be recognized that men could not weave textiles if the preparation steps were not completed, and their textiles would fetch much lower prices in the market without all of the finishing steps typically done by women. Additionally, these gender divisions may be transgressed depending on the circumstances; in fact, many Otavalans express their gendered labor as a result of “what was always done,” a tradition, rather than some sort of taboo or restriction. Further, women are generally responsible for selling these textiles in the market, since sales are considered to be social interactions and it is presumed that women are more skilled at engaging in social interactions (Plattner 1989:209).

As stated previously, Otavalan people and crafts travel in order to sell textiles, which expands the community and creates transnational ties that cross the boundaries of nation-states through kin-based institutions like *compadrazgo*, or co-parenthood (Stephen 2005:57; Kyle 2000). Kinship networks keep social connections alive, despite the

distance, because vendors generally travel where their family has contacts and where Otavalan communities are already established abroad (Kyle 2000).

In the past, Otavaleños used a predominantly matrilineal descent ideology, but because of Spanish colonial influence, they generally observe bilateral descent today. From my observations, Otavalan kin networks are largely flexible, making use of *compadrazgo* and unofficial adoptions to creatively expand kin networks in order to leverage economic and social capital, especially to cope with poverty circumstances. This flexibility allows for individuals to access different kin and fictive kin relationships, depending on their needs. This flexibility in kin network ideology may be related to the flexibility of gendered labor that I observed in regard to craft production (for example, when women are the weavers), which deviates from the strict gender roles often described in the literature. Because labor roles can reflect gender ideologies, both the expected behaviors and moments of transgression are telling. The transgressions or flexibility of gendered labor that I observed was generally related to economic necessity; in other words, women would weave when the family needed a weaver to meet production needs that could not be met by men alone, whether there were no men or not enough men present, or the men's health prevented them from fulltime weaving.

Decisions about what designs, color combinations, and styles are made by craft producers, but with input from vendors, who will comment on what consumers want based on what has been selling well and the comments from consumers. For woven textiles, the weaver – who is typically a man – may ultimately decide which designs and color combinations to use. For portable handmade crafts produced by vendors in the market, the crafter – who is typically a woman – will ultimately decide what to produce. However, producers also create commission work for vendors, shops, and individual consumers, all of whom dictate what the producer should make by providing samples or photos to be matched, including design and color combinations. Vendors also pay attention to the style of clothing tourists wear and may prompt producers to reflect current fashion trends in craft production. Thus, in terms of decision-making authority, multiple factors influence who may ultimately decide what is being produced, in what quantities, and how it will be marketed.

Otavaleños often utilize discourses of family values and communal relationships in their stories of textile production as positive forces of indigeneity. It seems that Otavaleños are able to capitalize on their (presumably) authentic identity as indigenous people when they make sales of handicrafts in the market, whether or not they are the producer of those handicrafts (Salomon 1981; Stephen 1991; Meisch 2002). In some regard, tourists have forced indigenous peoples to maintain an outdated image of indigenous identity in order to be recognized as indigenous and “authentic,” permitting them to make sales in tourist markets (Shlossberg 2015).

By viewing Otavalan textiles as a way of structuring kin and household relations, textiles become valuable to Otavalan communities by enhancing social solidarity and by keeping production and profits within communities (as opposed to outsourcing for cheaper labor). Extended kin networks benefit from helping each other to increase production and by using their networks to sell textiles in markets abroad. Yet, higher class Otavalans tend to benefit disproportionately. Otavaleños who are already of higher economic standing have the capital to own more means of production and can hire additional workers to produce more textiles, so they have more products to be able to offer a wide variety of items as they sell in multiple markets simultaneously. This increased representation tends to yield more profit because they have more opportunities to make a sale. They may also have wholesale contracts to supplement the weekly market at the Planza de Ponchos, where there is no guarantee that a day spent in the market will yield any sales. Further, they are more likely to be able to travel abroad to vend in foreign markets, where they can diversify their market knowledge.

Within families, men benefit from this organization of labor more than women because weaving is considered more prestigious and skill-based than vending or other steps in the production process (de la Cadena 1995). Women must know how to complete more steps in the production process, but this knowledge is devalued because it is deemed ‘help,’ rather than ‘work.’ Thus, I argue that women have been overlooked as craft producers in existing literature as producers and that their skills as producers and vendors have been devalued.

4.5.4 Otavalan Textiles as Social Capital

For Otavaleños, textile production is both a means of maintaining their indigeneity and a means of accumulating social capital. Various acts intended to assimilate Otavalans actually signaled a revitalization of their culture: “Not only did the market expansion in Otavalo fail to destroy the community institutions but it also gave rise to an indigenous intelligentsia whose members redefined Indian identity in accordance with new cultural and economic realities” (Korovkin 1998:126). Rather than asking how Otavalans have been so financially successful in their engagement in the global economy through craft production, Kyle instead asked: “What kinds of non-financial resources (social, political) were in place in order to give some Otavalans the incentive to become independent merchants, and indeed the expectation that they would succeed on a global scale?” (Kyle 1999:424). He has used the concept of social capital to explore the social relations inherent in textile production and distribution, noting like Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999) does, that some Otavalans had more wealth and prestige that placed them to be better situated in craft production and distribution. Thus, the returns of craft production are not received homogenously among all Otavalans, but such that those who already had more social capital have yielded higher economic and social returns on the sales of craft production. Further, Kyle described the transnational vending of Otavalan textiles process as a “unique economic strategy, based on an informal growth economy and the social and cultural capital of the Otavaleños” (2000:33).

Because of Otavalans’ success as entrepreneurs, artisans from other ethnic groups – including indigenous people from Ecuador and throughout Latin America – have arranged business deals with Otavalans, who purchase and resell the (often handmade) goods on their behalf. Otavaleños typically market these handicrafts as their own in order to increase their number of sales, maintain the façade of narrowly-defined ‘authenticity,’ and increase the amount of income they can make on each sale. Since Otavalan goods have been considered to be of high quality, it stands to reason that they could ask a higher price than other, less-well known indigenous groups if they claimed the items as their own. Because of this process, Kyle has referred to Otavalo as “the site of an ethnic economy based on the manufacturing and brokering of its own indigenous and other group’s ethnic clothing and handicrafts” (2000:x). When Otavalans sold crafts made by

other indigenous groups as though they were their own, they were strategically utilizing symbolic emblems and icons of indigeneity, while increasing their social capital as producers and vendors of indigenous crafts.

When Otavalan textiles are viewed in terms of social capital, all Otavalans may benefit from the view of them as high-quality producers and from descriptions of the Plaza de Ponchos as a ‘must-see’ tourist destination. They have achieved a status that not all craft producers reach of being known for high-quality products, although we will see below that this reputation is changing. They are known worldwide, which allows them to be easily recognizable and make sales, even in foreign settings. However, recently, there has been an influx of cheap, imported goods to the market that might hurt this reputation. If Otavalan textiles are no longer viewed as high-quality products, will the Plaza de Ponchos remain a ‘must-see’ tourist destination, or will tourists flock to other markets or shops that showcase handmade items? This question is already being asked by Otavalan producers and vendors, as well as local mestizos; the answer will unfold over the coming years and has the potential to greatly impact their livelihood as well as their culture.

Despite tourists coming from around the globe because of the prestige of Otavalans and despite the Ecuadorian state upholding them as ‘model Indians,’ Otavaleños still face racism and discrimination at home (Kyle 2000; de la Torre 1999). Being a craft producer, being Otavalan does not provide them with enough social capital to avoid the racism and discrimination many indigenous peoples face around the world. Yet, Otavalans who already have social capital and are considered to have higher socioeconomic status benefit the most from the valuation of crafts as social capital. This view tends to exacerbate already existing disparities within communities, rather than serving as a levelling mechanism. As Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999) has noted, the gap between wealthy and poor Otavalans is increasing.

4.5.5 Otavalan Weaving as “Timeless and Authentic”

In tourism advertising, Otavalan weaving is often presented as a “timeless and authentic” representation of Otavalan identity, which primes tourists’ expectations. However, we must situate contemporary production and distribution of Otavalan textiles historically. As described in Chapter 2, *obrajes* changed the methods of production, the

expectations of output, and ideas about gendered labor in craft production. As I have argued, we can understand modern gendered labor in regard to textile production as a result of *obrajes*. Previously, “spinning and weaving on a backstrap loom were considered ‘female’ tasks” (Graubart 2000:554). The idea that men should be the primary weavers was ingrained in families through the *obraje* system between the 1500s and 1700s and was supported by the introduction of floor looms into the homes of Otavalans. Contemporary Otavaleños often explain the current gendered division of labor by stating they feel that tradition dictates men as weavers, even though it appears that this “tradition” is a result of Spanish interference and that women were most likely the primary weavers in precolonial times (Callañaupa Alvarez 2007:48-60). If we are comfortable dating “tradition” to the Spanish colonial period, then it would be easy to agree that Otavalan weaving is “timeless and authentic.” However, if we acknowledge that precolonial indigenous history is also important, then we must acknowledge that current ideas about gendered production of textiles are a 350-year-old ‘tradition’ that reversed earlier ideas about textile production. That is not to say there is not a historical basis for the contemporary gendered division of labor in textile production, but it cannot be considered “timeless” or unchanging. Yet, this history is not known by tourists or even some indigenous Otavaleños.

Additionally, technologies and materials have changed. It is increasingly common for Otavaleños to purchase pre-processed yarn, rather than to purchase raw fibers that must be cleaned, carded, dyed, and spun into yarn. Today, Otavalan textiles are almost never woven on backstrap looms, and even floor looms are becoming less common, in favor of machinated hand weaving looms that create fewer mistakes in textiles and increase the speed and quantity of production. Thus, production is becoming increasingly mechanized to meet consumers’ demands. Additionally, there has been a shift away from natural dyes to acrylic dyes that offer brighter, more vibrant colors that last longer and are cheaper and less labor-intensive than natural dyes. Because wool and alpaca are expensive and labor-intensive fibers, there has been a shift to acrylic fibers or acrylic-natural blends that allow for lower production costs, less time investment, and often increased durability. Acrylic fibers or acrylic-natural blends also allow for softer, fuller, fluffier products because most consumers describe 100% wool as itchy and irritating,

unless treated with harsh and expensive chemicals. This is not to say that technologies and materials should not change, as it would be ridiculous to expect indigenous production techniques to remain static when we expect change from all other industries and producers, but once again, this highlights that Otavalan textile production cannot be considered a paragon of techniques that date to time immemorial. I do not think it would be fair to consider contemporary Otavalan textiles ‘inauthentic’ simply because they are adapting to changing demands, although many local mestizos and tourists who learn of adaptations in materials and production techniques often make that very argument (See Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of this). Furthermore, Otavaleños have a long history of production for outsiders, which includes a history of syncretism and tailoring to outside tastes in style and form. Changes in technologies and materials are simply building on this history. Thus, Otavalan weaving may be considered an “authentic” representation of Otavalan identity in that Otavaleño weavers are choosing to represent themselves through textile production, but it cannot and should not be viewed as “timeless” or unchanging because that places unrealistic expectations, limitations, and normative judgments on their craft production.

4.6 Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated how the valorization of crafts differs depending on the actor, whether that be the state, consumers, producers, or vendors. Further, crafts also act a lens through which we can understand the relationship between ethnicity, nationality, indigeneity, class, and gender. Turning to Otavalan crafts, in particular, it is possible to observe how outsiders often classify Otavalan weaving as ‘timeless and authentic,’ and how Otavalan producers and vendors both resist this classification and use it strategically in the market. In the next chapter, I will further explore the significance of Otavalan crafts in the market, focusing on gendered labor.

CHAPTER 5. GENDERED LABOR AND OTAVALAN CRAFTS

As stated in Chapter 1, this research investigates how Otavalan women are navigating craft work and identity in relation to changing market conditions. I analyze the kind of work do women do, and which forms of labor are rendered visible and invisible to different parties (especially regarding gendered labor in craft production).

While conducting my dissertation research, I realized that my academic assumptions and research priorities as a white, American academic did not align with the lived experiences and priorities of indigenous Otavaleños. This required not only a shift in my data collection during my dissertation fieldwork, but also in how I present the findings of my research. Ultimately, I chose not to abandon my guiding research questions that focus on the relationship between gender, ethnicity, and economics because sexism, racism, and economic disparity do impact indigenous Otavalan daily life. However, on a daily basis, these appear lower on most indigenous Otavalans' priority lists, in the face of more immediate concerns. Therefore, I shifted my focus to better reflect the immediate concerns of indigenous Otavalans, especially in the context of Venezuelan immigrants occupying the similar market niche and changing consumer expectations. I will argue throughout this chapter that Otavalan women's navigation of these circumstances demonstrates the macro level concerns of the intersection of gendered labor, identity, indigeneity, and the perception of others. The identity of indigenous Otavalans is enacted through their daily lives and, in particular, through their relationship with crafts. For indigenous Otavalan women, their identities are often visibly signaled in the marketplace where they sell and often make crafts.

Indigenous Otavaleños describe their lives in relation to *artesanías*, or handicrafts/crafts, utilizing a holistic perspective to describe crafts. While they group individuals into categories of producer-vendor and vendor, which describe one's specific relations to crafts, they do not separate production and distribution into discrete categories as is done in economic anthropology. In other words, all Otavalans are involved in crafts, whether they produce crafts or sell them. While some Otavalans may place these different groups into a hierarchy, the majority of Otavalans with whom I interacted saw these groups as equally significant, both for their economy and for their

identity. Being a craft producer was no better than being a craft vendor because, ultimately, it was the broad category of “crafts” that was integral to their identity as indigenous Otavaleños. Although anthropology as a discipline has a long history of studying indigenous peoples, the literature is not abundant with examples of how to successfully incorporate indigenous knowledge and perspectives into Western academic writing that often relies on Western theoretical perspectives. For the framework of this chapter, I drew inspiration from reports describing indigenous cultural resource management, like the reports from the U.S. Department of the Interior (2015) and United States Government Accountability Office (2021). Thus, in this dissertation I have attempted to listen to and learn from the indigenous perspectives not only in the findings that are presented but also in how those findings are presented by focusing on gendered labor and indigenous identity as they relate to crafts.

5.1 Gendered Labor and Crafts

As described above, most indigenous Otavaleños with whom I spoke felt the notion of separate men’s and women’s work was an idea from the past that only “the *machistas*” still firmly believe today. However, nearly all interviewees could describe the kinds of work associated with men and with women, the importance of the work, and possible repercussions for transgressing these norms of gendered labor. The explanation for this division of labor generally centered around tradition (“what was always done”) and ability, rather than strict taboos. Yet, as mentioned in a previous chapter, a man who is publicly known to perform domestic labor (considered women’s work) can still face social stigma and ridicule, being labeled a “*mandarino*,” a derogatory term for a man who is bossed around.¹ Women who engage in paid labor outside the home (considered men’s work) might be judged harshly for being overly masculine and abandoning her family, while her husband and/or father could be considered failures at providing for their household. I have witnessed both men and women judged as violating norms about gendered labor when indigenous Otavalan women were employed outside the home. An

¹ This term is also used by mestizos in Ecuador, so it is not specifically an indigenous idea. However, I personally only heard this sentiment expressed by indigenous Otavalans during the course of my research.

exception to this appears to be women's involvement in selling crafts in the market, as this is a socially accepted form of paid labor for indigenous women because it builds on the role of crafts as integral to indigenous Otavalan identity. During an interview, Jazmin explained,

Growing up in Peguche, we were poor. We didn't have a mom [because their mother died when the children were young and their father never remarried], so we started working [at a young age]. [As one of the older children] I left primary school to work and help with my younger siblings. One by one, we followed our sister Lucia to work in the Plaza [de Ponchos] because it is better work and better money. Other families from Peguche traveled to New York or Puerto Rico to sell, but we stayed here. [Translated by author].

Becoming vendors in the Otavalan market allowed for these sisters to provide for their families. During another interview, Claudia told me, "Now, everyone can do everything. Before, only men worked [for pay outside the home], and women were in the house. Now, women work here [in the Plaza de Ponchos] more than men. It's a priority for women to provide for their families and work makes them feel independent" [translated by author]. As noted earlier, this strict division of labor in which women worked at home and men worked outside of the home differs from the documented past. Therefore, it is interesting that Otavalans are constructing a past for themselves in new (possibly classed) ways. Claudia's comment reflects how indigenous Otavalan women respond to and attempt to alter expectations about gendered labor.

Men's work is typically more visible and more highly valued than women's work in Otavalo. According to my interlocutors, men usually take care of the land/agriculture, business, and finances, while women generally cook, take care of the house and children, and sell handicrafts. This is interesting because it has been documented that Otavalan women have been involved in agriculture, business, and finance, which has also been noted elsewhere in literature on indigenous market women (ex: Babb 2011). Men are famously depicted in the literature as the weavers, the musicians, the artisans – all visible forms of labor that are championed as integral to Otavalan identity. Meanwhile, women are described in the literature as caregivers and helpers in the craft industry – downplaying the significance of their work and invisibilizing much of their labor. Yet, I argue that women's work as craft vendors is incredibly significant not only because it is

visible to locals and foreigners alike, but also because it provides a socially acceptable avenue for women to work outside the home (vending in various markets) and because it is the act of making sales that allows a family to make a living via crafts. Even if it were true that men were always the craft producers, a family could not survive without selling those crafts, a task more typically associated with women's work. This would also make financial and business-related tasks women's work. Yet, men are not always the craft producers and women are not always the vendors, so a more detailed account of the work Otavalan men and women actually perform is provided below.

Although many believe the view on gendered labor among Otavaleños is changing or has already changed, observations and interviews still signal the continuity of gendered tasks, although they may be less rigid. Because gendered labor is fluid and tasks are often perceived hierarchically in importance, the gendered labor of Otavalans in relation to crafts is revealing about how they envision and enact gender in their daily lives. In this chapter, I argue women's labor has been invisibilized in the literature and an in-depth focus on women's labor may provide insight into changing gender relations in the region as the social, economic, and political context changes.

5.1.1 Invisibilizing Women's Craft Labor

For nearly seventy years, there has been specialization in production, with certain communities known for various handicrafts (Meisch 2002:33). Yet, despite this specialization, many of these crafts are sold in the same marketplace by vendors who have crafts from several different communities. Kyle explained, "Some of the Otavalans' 'native' handicrafts are produced by other ethnic groups," or by indigenous people who are not Otavalan, but they were still presented in the market as being made by Otavalans (Kyle 1999:439). This trend led Kyle to claim, "Otavalans are rapidly becoming the principal brokers of native crafts from Latin America" because Otavalans have sold handicrafts on behalf of other indigenous people but claimed the handicrafts as their own (Kyle 1999:440). Thus, there is a paradox between the production and selling of Otavalan handicrafts.

By analyzing the production chains of Otavalan crafts, it is possible to better understand who was involved in the various production steps and how that both reflects

and shapes ideas about gendered labor. Otavalan crafts embody cottage economies and often passed through multiple family members or multiple households of social networks or extended kin networks for the completion of items. As an example of goods produced predominantly for the tourist market, I will describe aprons and their production chains.



Figure 5.1 A new item introduced in 2016 was embroidered aprons, available in two styles. The white cotton apron (left) was embroidered by hand, while the colorful polyester apron style was machine embroidered or screen-printed. [Author photo]

A new item introduced in 2016 was embroidered aprons, available in two styles (See Figures 5.1, 5.2). I was personally intrigued by these items because they are practical (often a gifting consideration), but they are also different from many of the items available in the market, as they clearly cater to white and mestizo customers. The white cotton apron was embroidered by hand and was intended as a statement piece. Many customers bought them as decorations to hang on the wall in their kitchens or in restaurants. By contrast, the colorful polyester apron was available in every color and was machine embroidered or screen-printed. The colorful aprons frequently featured recipes or the “Ecuador: ama la vida” [translated by author: “Ecuador: love life”] tourism slogan. Because of the fabric and color, these are better suited for cooking. The various apron designs meant customers could find something for everyone’s taste. As cooking and baking are becoming more popular among millennials in the U.S., they have the potential

to become popular souvenirs because they are small, lightweight, and practical, both for gifts and personal use.



Figure 5.2 The white aprons were made from the same cotton material as tablecloths, hand towels, and other items that have been found in the market for years. Each of these items were hand-embroidered. The white aprons were also available in children’s sizes.
[Author photo]

In 2016 and 2017, vendors made many apron sales because of the novelty of the items. However, by 2018, nearly every vendor carried aprons, and their apron sales declined. Many tourists were intrigued by the aprons but opted not to buy them, saving their money and space for items that seemed more “authentic” or “exotic.” In 2018, Lucia told me that not many people bought aprons from her anymore, even though people bought many aprons from her in 2017. It seems the novelty of the item has worn off as the market has become inundated with them. Still, attempts at innovation continued, with red and black fabric aprons being hand-embroidered in 2018. As of 2017, only white

cotton aprons were hand-embroidered. Because of the time and skill involved, hand-embroidered aprons fetch a higher price than machine embroidered or screen-printed aprons. For both styles of aprons, the profit margin was quite small but fell under the category of small sales that are easier to make, a marketing strategy that many vendors employ.

Lucia's oldest son Javier had recently graduated from high school. He worked as a vendor in the market at a neighboring stall and also managed an apron production chain. Javier purchased white fabric and cut it to make aprons. He added the pockets and trim pieces, along with the help of his younger brother Agustín (who was still in school), but neither young man embroidered the aprons. In the past, their mother Lucia would hand-embroider items, but she is no longer able to do so. So, the aprons were sent to other women who hand-embroidered them. These women were contacts in their social network, as their relatives were involved in other forms of craft production and vending. In conversations with me, the family credited Javier with making the aprons, a point of pride, since he had only recently become involved in craft production, and also because his employment aspirations lie outside of crafts. Lucia proudly told potential customers that her son made the white aprons she sells, a vending strategy often utilized in the Plaza de Ponchos. Yet, Javier did not make the aprons alone but, rather, with the help of family members and female contacts. While not structurally necessary and therefore a finishing step, the hand-embroidery was the main selling point of these items. This labor was completed by women, but it is invisibilized in the stories told about these aprons. Although we discussed these aprons on multiple occasions and I pressed for more information, no names of the women who completed the embroidery were ever provided, thus further highlighting how the labor of indigenous Otavalan women in craft production is invisibilized.

While I focused on one family's production of white hand-embroidered aprons, this strategy of contracting women outside of the household to hand-embroider designs on the aprons was the most frequent production strategy for these items. Alicia is a vendor in the Plaza de Ponchos, who usually sold items alone on Wednesdays and Saturdays. According to Alicia, the preferences of the embroiderers was often reflected in the colors and designs the women choose to embroider, so different apron producers may

choose to work with different women. For instance, after receiving critiques that the white aprons are too feminine because they always had flowers on them, Alicia has asked the women who embroidered her aprons to use more masculine colors with designs like turtles or snails. Alicia took credit for being the producer of the aprons, using possessive language: “these are mine. I make these” [translated by author]. Her position as a producer-vendor made her labor more publicly visible. While she mentioned the other women who embroider the aprons, again, she did not refer to them by name or share the ownership credit for production with them. Once again, indigenous Otavalan women seem to be placed in the category of “helper” rather than “craft producer.”

5.1.1.1 Vending as (In)Authentic Craft Production

As described earlier, Otavalan crafts have long been synonymous with woven textiles, but weaving technology and ideas about gendered labor have changed over time. Described in more detail above, the general historical trends are: women produced handwoven textiles on backstrap looms for family use prior to Spanish contact (Callañaupa Alvarez 2007; Graubart 2000); men produced handwoven textiles on floor looms introduced by the Spanish for the Spanish Crown to meet labor quotas in the *obraje* system during the Spanish colonial period (Meisch 2002; Graubart 2000; Korovkin 1998; Solomon 1981; Phelan 1967); and today, textiles created by men via machinated hand weaving for tourists has eclipsed handwoven textiles on floor looms as the dominant production technique. Machinated hand weaving is associated with men’s work and is the most visible and recognized form of Otavalan craft production. Yet, Otavaleños – Otavalan women in particular – produce and sell other crafts. As the number of individuals involved in weaving textiles declines, other forms of craft production may become increasingly significant in the future.

Otavalan women vendors often produced portable handmade crafts – like crocheting, knitting, embroidery, jewelry, etc. – in the market (See Figure 5.4). Walking through the Plaza de Ponchos, one could observe Otavalan women making necklaces like the ones they wear, which they then sell to tourists (See Figure 5.12). For their own wear, they typically purchased higher quality necklaces from Otavalan women vending in other locations. While in the market, Otavalan women may also hand-embroider the blouses

they wear as part of their *de anaco* indigenous dress. The most common form of portable handmade craft production was crocheting/knitting. Otavalan women may crochet/knit scarves or hats, but the most popular item was the Aya Huma mask (See Figure 5.3). Aya Huma is an important ritual figure in Inti Raymi/San Juan [the Kichwa and Spanish names for a religious holiday in June] celebrations in Otavalo. Sometimes described as a “devil” or “two-faced devil” (a legacy of Spanish interpretation), Aya Huma is a colorful protector, who is sometimes also portrayed as a clown. While Aya Huma masks were purchased by locals and worn by indigenous Otavalans during religious festivities, they were also popular with tourists because they have a distinctive look. Tourists noticed these public forms of craft production, and stopped to watch the women crochet/knit, sometimes taking pictures or speaking to the women about the items they are producing, language skills permitting. Thus, portable handmade crafts were a visible form of craft production for tourists visiting the market.



Figure 5.3 Crafts that can be produced in the marketplace, such as these crocheted Aya Huma masks were important for the enactment of female indigenous vendors' identity.

[Author photo]



Figure 5.4 Indigenous Otavalan women often produced portable crafts in the marketplace. This allowed them to pass time in between tending to customers and was another way in which their identity was visible to tourists in the market. [Author photo]

I suggest that portable handmade crafts are significant in the performance of female indigeneity for tourists visiting the Plaza de Ponchos in Otavalo. Otavalan women's market visibility is discussed throughout this dissertation and especially throughout this chapter. In some ways, Otavalan women are made visible as they market indigenous identity with their *de anaco* dress and the portable crafts they make in the market, while in other ways, their economic contributions and work in craft production is actively minimized or rendered invisible. For tourists who are unfamiliar with these nuances, the identity of Otavalan women is made visible in the Plaza de Ponchos by their *de anaco* dress and the production of portable handmade crafts, both of which serve as boundary markers of Otherness. For locals, dressing *de anaco* signals one's indigeneity and home community, as different indigenous peoples from throughout Ecuador have different styles of traditional clothing that are upheld today. For tourists, *de anaco* dress

serves as boundary markers of exoticized indigeneity in relation to other identities in the marketplace.

Yet, Otavalans typically envisioned craft production in terms of weaving, whether produced via machinated hand weaving described in Chapter 3 or handwoven textiles produced on floor looms described in Chapter 6. When I spoke with Otavalan women about crafts and textiles, most would tell me “I don’t make them” or “I don’t know how to make them” [translated by author]. There were several women who I knew from the course of previous research trips, so I had personal knowledge that they produced portable handmade crafts. When I asked them further about specific examples (e.g., “what about Aya Humas? Or scarves?” “I thought you embroidered that blouse?” “Didn’t you make necklaces before?”), they would agree that they knew that particular skill, but they did not consider themselves to be craft producers. Rather, they envisioned their relationship with crafts in terms of vending.

Thus, there is a hierarchy of Otavalan crafts, with woven textiles at the top, building on a centuries-long legacy of Otavalan textiles being recognizable and respected internationally. Portable handmade crafts were not considered to be significant *artesanías* by most Otavalans because they are not woven textiles. Therefore, many Otavalan women did not consider themselves to be craft producers because they were not likely to weave textiles. Therefore, there is a different framing of women’s craft production contributions, whether it be the production of handmade portable crafts or other key steps in producing textiles. Thus, while Otavalan women vendors visibly produced portable handmade crafts in the market, their contributions as craft producers were rendered invisible in public discourse because they were not perceived as weavers.

The quantity of production may also be an important factor regarding the label of craft producer. Otavalan women vendors who produced portable handmade crafts in the market did not consider themselves and were not considered by others as producer-vendors. They produced enough crafts to supply their own stall and perhaps the stall of a single family member or neighbor in the market, but they did not produce enough crafts to supply vendors throughout the market. Therefore, they saw themselves and were seen by other Otavalans as vendors, rather than producer-vendors. Although no Otavalan women used this term, their production of portable handmade crafts seems to be viewed

more as a hobby that supplemented and supported their occupation of vending, than as craft production.

Otavalan women generally described the significance of Otavalan crafts in terms of teaching lessons about hard work and for helping them to pass the time in the market. One semi-structured ethnographic interview question asked: Do textiles teach any lessons? [translated by author as: ¿Los tejidos enseñan alguna lección?] (See Appendix for Interview Guide). In a joint interview with husband-and-wife Eduardo and Pilar, they said, “They teach the importance of hard work” [translated by author]. Claudia answered, “They teach responsibility, that not everything is easy. It’s hard to make crafts.” Both of these responses highlight the hard work associated with craft production. Interestingly, Eduardo, Pilar, and Claudia all know how to weave textiles. Eduardo and Pilar had a machinated hand weaving production site at their home. Claudia predominantly crocheted *shigra* bags while vending in the market, but she learned how to handweave on a floor loom out of economic necessity when she was younger. Thus, while their responses stressed the hard work associated with craft production, they did not specifically address weaving or any of the steps involved in producing textiles.

Highlighting the mental aspect of craft production, Isabel replied to the same question, “Making handicrafts teaches lessons because when you’re learning, you forget your problems because your thoughts are only on the work at hand. They help with focus, self-improvement, and new ideas [creativity]” [translated by author]. Isabel and I had numerous conversations about the creativity involved in craft production. For Isabel, producing crafts was a form of escapism from the world. While she enjoyed vending in the market, her favorite part of being in the market was crocheting headbands and the way in which producing handmade portable crafts engaged her brain.

Ana Lucia was one of only two interviewees to note the symbolism of designs in response to this question, although the next question in each interview overtly asked about the symbolism of designs. She said, “The designs in tapestries are symbolic. For example, *chismosas*,” which she showed me on a *panadera*, an embroidered napkin meant for wrapping bread [translated by author]. “Chismosas” translates to “the gossipers,” but it refers more generally to the famous depiction of a group of Otavalan women dressed *de anaco*, shown from behind, with their long braids hanging down their

backs. Carolina also noted the symbolism of designs, saying, “Textiles represent our customs. Tapestries depict leaders, which is significant, or geometric designs, like the *chakana* [the Andean/Incan cross]” [translated by author]. What I found interesting is that both women noted the symbolism of tapestry designs specifically, but many of the same designs are used on other items, evidenced by Ana Lucia’s use of the *panadera* as a visual reference. Handwoven tapestries were often viewed by Otavalans as being a more traditional handicraft, so it is possible that the women’s association of symbolic Otavalan designs with tapestries reflects the hierarchy of Otavalan crafts.

Only two responses described the significance of crafts in terms of connecting Otavalans to a legacy of craft production, with ‘crafts’ envisioned both as handicrafts/*artesanías* and as textiles. Jazmin replied, “When you learn to make crafts, you learn lessons about the past and your ancestors” [translated by author]. Jazmin proudly crocheted Aya Huma masks in the market. While she did not consider herself a craft producer, her response acknowledged a place for all crafts and producers in understanding Otavalan crafts past and present. Thus, craft production enmeshes contemporary producers in the historical web of Otavalan craft production. It allows contemporary producers to enact tasks linked to identity performance dating back centuries. In a joint interview with neighbors Emilia and Alicia, and Alicia’s brother Félix, Félix said, “Textiles conserve our identity, which is key” [translated by author]. Notice that Félix specifically singled out textiles in his response. Like many Otavalans (which is reflected in the literature about Otavalo), textiles are linked to indigenous Otavalan identity. This further demonstrates the hierarchy of craft production by focusing specifically on textiles and erasing the publicly visible contributions of women who produced handmade portable crafts in the market. Thus, while Otavalan women vendors produced portable handmade crafts in the market, which made their identity visible to tourists visiting the market, their contributions as craft producers were invisibilized for and by other Otavalans because they were not weavers, so they were not perceived as craft producers. As the items available in the Plaza de Ponchos continue to shift, it is possible that portable handmade crafts produced by Otavalan women vendors will increase in importance as a way to visibly demonstrate indigenous Otavalan identity and provide a sense of authenticity to the market.

5.1.1.2 Adapting ‘Local’ to Sell ‘Authentic’ Crafts

Between my pre-dissertation research in 2014 and my dissertation research in 2017 and 2018, I noticed several new locally produced items being sold in the Plaza de Ponchos. One such item was a new style of blanket that appeared around 2015 (See Figure 5.5). They were made in Peguche, which is where many vendors purchase them to resell the blankets at their stalls in the market. There were two sizes that were both larger than the style of blanket previously sold in the Plaza de Ponchos. For years, vendors told me the blankets they sold were made from alpaca, but more recently, Diego and Andrea explained that the price point would be impossible for such an expensive fiber (the blankets are sold for \$20-35, depending on the style). The new style of blanket was not as soft as the older one, so vendors generally described it as having a higher acrylic content and a lower alpaca content, to keep it affordable. In reality, the blankets did not contain any alpaca fleece, but underwent a finishing process that fluffs the acrylic fibers to make the blanket fuller and softer, emulating the feel of an item that consists of an acrylic-alpaca mix. When I asked Lucia about the new blankets, she said the starting price was \$28 but vendors would sometimes sell them for as low as \$19 or \$20 to make a sale. I never personally saw the blankets sell for less than \$25 and saw them sell for as much as \$35. If the blankets were entirely made of alpaca, they would cost between \$100-300, so customers felt they were getting a bargain. This style seemed to heavily feature geometric indigenous designs and llamas and were in mostly natural colors (browns, maroons, and grays with white/cream designs). Thus, the fiber and the design made customers think they had purchased an “authentic” item that actually used synthetic fibers and was a relatively new addition to the market.



Figure 5.5 A new style of blanket was introduced from Peru around 2015. These blankets usually featured llamas or geometric designs and were often described by vendors as being made from alpaca fleece or a mixture of alpaca fleece and synthetic fibers. They were produced in Peguche and Peru, and they contained no alpaca fleece. [Author photo]

Another vendor confirmed that the new blankets were made locally, but they were originally from Peru. According to him, one family brought the design back from Peru and began making it locally, without changing the llama design. Once the blankets reached the Plaza de Ponchos, other families copied the design, which spread throughout the market. He and Lucia had both told me that once a design, style, and/or item is imported to the Plaza, others quickly copy it, especially if it sells well. These blankets were made via machinated hand weaving, in which designs are programmed into electric looms that produced the same design until a new program is input, which explains why there were so many blankets with the same design. The introduction of these items and the adaptation to local production highlights how the notion of ‘local’ was adapted to produce and sell crafts considered under narrowly defined terms of ‘authenticity.’

5.1.1.3 Importing (In)Authentic Handicrafts

An increasing number of goods produced outside of Ecuador are being sold in the Plaza de Ponchos, alongside locally produced goods. Some of these items are artisanally made, but most of them are mass produced. Many vendors attributed the items to the person from whom they were purchased (usually an Ecuadorian mestizo middleman) or

the place they were purchased (usually Otavalo or the Plaza de Ponchos specifically), rather than the country of origin or people group who were the producers. This obfuscated some of the commodity chain, while allowing vendors to truthfully say the items were “from Ecuador” or “from here.” In my experience, vendors were slightly more transparent about acknowledging the origin of an item if it originated from another Latin American country than if it was imported from China. It was also common for vendors to note that imported items were sold in the market while insisting that they did not personally sell items that are imported. Nonetheless, many locals and informed international consumers were aware that the Plaza de Ponchos featured items from Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and China.

With the exception of Peruvian goods, the items from Latin American countries often make their way to Otavalo through transnational vending networks, like those discussed by David Kyle (1999; 2000) and discussed in more detail below. Family members who live abroad to sell Otavalan crafts will bring items and handicrafts from those countries when they return to Otavalo to restock their supply and visit with their family. Thus, these items are typically sold by a single extended family, although they will sometimes resell items to other vendors with whom they have a working relationship. For example, an adult male of one family of Otavalan vendors lives and sells Otavalan handicrafts in Panama. When he returns to Ecuador to restock his supply, he brings Kuna *molas* for his family to sell in the Otavalan market (See Figure 5.6). I was quite surprised to see Kuna *molas* from Panama in Otavalo on a Saturday because they are incredibly recognizable for anyone who studies textiles (see Tice 1995); yet, to uninformed tourists, they seemed to fit with the expected textiles being offered throughout the market, while standing out as being unique. In fact, the young woman vendor was happily surprised that I knew about the *molas*. Perhaps because it was obvious that I was well-informed, so there was no point in obfuscating their origins, but she was happy to chat with me about her family’s transnational vending situation. In 2017, only the one family offered *molas* in their selection. By 2018, I discovered one neighboring vendor who also carried them, but the items were still rare by the market’s standards.



Figure 5.6 Kuna *molas* from Panama for sale at a stall in the street adjacent to the Plaza de Ponchos, alongside locally produced items, like this white cotton hand-embroidered apron. The bluish hue to this photo is cast by the tarp the vendor put up to protect her goods from the elements. [Author photo]



Figure 5.7 Heavily embroidered Guatemalan items like tablecloths, runners, and pillowcases, stand out from other stalls in the Plaza de Ponchos, leveraging a kin network with family members living in Guatemala. [Author photo]

Another Otavalan family had members who lived in Guatemala and sold Otavalan handicrafts there. The remaining family members opted to sell only Guatemalan goods (embroidered tablecloths, runners, and pillowcases and some woven textiles) at their stall in the Plaza de Ponchos, which allowed them to stand out from their neighboring vendors (See Figure 5.7). They also had signage indicating that they accepted credit cards, which was rare in the Plaza de Ponchos. Most tourists were drawn to the uniqueness of the stall but did not know the items were imported from Guatemala. To accommodate the shortage of workers due to family members living in Guatemala, the family has hired other Otavaleños to help staff their stall for decades. As a result, they have sold items to their former workers and to their current employee's family, who mixed a small number of Guatemalan goods with other handicrafts at their stalls in the Plaza de Ponchos. One such item sold by Ana Lucia, a former employee, were *paneras*. I have seen similar items

for sale in the U.S. under the name of folding trays or snap trays (See Figures 5.8, 5.9). They are flat textiles with strings at each of the corners, which can be tied to create a shallow open top tray or dish. The *paneras* were clever because they folded flat for transport and storage, which was appealing to travelers. They were handwoven on floor looms in Guatemala. An informed customer would likely recognize the distinctive weaving style and patterns as Guatemalan. An average customer would likely recognize that the weaving differed from locally produced textiles, even if she was unable to place the origin. Ana Lucia explained that *paneras* could be used to hold bread, napkins, fake fruit, silverware, keys, or whatever else one can imagine. She bought them from her former boss who had returned to Otavalo in February/March 2018. She bought them for \$5 each and sells them for \$10. Because she was one of only two stalls in the Plaza de Ponchos to offer them, she had nearly sold out of her stock by July 2018.



Figure 5.8 Guatemalan *paneras*, handwoven on floor looms, have corners that tie to create a shallow tray or untie to store flat. These are similar to folding trays or snap trays in the U.S. [Author photo]



Figure 5.9 A cloth-lined leather snap tray from a popular stationary retail company in the U.S. These are similar to Guatemalan *paneras*. Photo source: <https://www.levenger.com/prestige-snap-tray-17208.aspx>

Many of the items in the Plaza de Ponchos were produced in Peru, distributed to indigenous Otavalan vendors by wholesale middlemen who were often mestizos, and resold by indigenous Otavalan vendors to tourists. Ricardo is a mestizo university professor who is widely known and respected among academics working in Ecuador. As a friend, he proved a valuable asset, providing me with access to literature and introductions to help expand my research network. One Saturday, Ricardo walked around the Plaza de Ponchos with me. He pointed out which items were from Peru or various places within Ecuador. According to him, most anything – sweaters, blankets, socks, scarves – supposedly made of “alpaca” was produced in Peru. Several vendors confirmed this, although many said the items were originally from Peru but were also being produced locally in Ecuador. Some items (for example: blankets, socks, and scarves) were concurrently made in both Peru and Ecuador. Different vendors carried items from

different countries, depending on their supplier and, as some explained, whether they prioritized price or quality. In addition to the material, Ricardo said you could also tell that the items were made in Peru by the design: llamas were a clear indicator that the designs are Peruvian. Again, this was not always a clear indicator of origin because local Ecuadorian production often replicated imported goods.

Ricardo also told me that some Otavalans had textiles factories in Peru because electricity, materials, and labor were cheaper there. This could make sense, as a great deal of raw materials (wool, cotton or acrylic yarn, and alpaca) were imported into Ecuador from Peru. This would also help to explain the continuing Peruvian influence on textiles made in Otavalo. However, this assertion was not confirmed by a single indigenous contact. I include these comments by Ricardo because they were reflective of some of the ideas held by local mestizos that the Plaza de Ponchos has changed (See Chapter 6 for this debate in more detail) due to the change in goods, namely more imported and machine-made goods.

I personally witnessed vendors purchase items made in Peru from mestizo middlemen. One day in July 2018 when I was sitting at Jazmin's stall, a mestizo man in his late twenties came by with two very large bags filled with items from Peru to sell to Otavalan vendors. This included stuffed guinea pigs wearing costumes, socks, and small stuffed alpacas. Jazmin bought several of the small alpacas, which she negotiated from \$47 down to \$39. She also convinced the man to loan her a bundle of 10 pairs of socks. She would normally have had to pay \$17 for the bundle, but she did not have the cash. While it was not uncommon for vendors and middlemen to loan items, he was originally reluctant because he would be out of the country and therefore unable to collect money from her future sales. After much joking and teasing, he eventually agreed to loan the socks to Jazmin for two weeks, when he would return to the market after a trip to Peru to obtain more products. Even though the socks and gloves were made locally in Ecuador as well, those made in Peru were cheaper, which explained the transaction.

Some items were produced exclusively in Peru, which vendors did not contest. Designed gourds were a popular item from Peru (See Figures 5.10, 5.11). They were decorated using a pyrography pen or wood burning technique. More recently, some of these gourds were being decorated with a combination of paint and pyrography to

resemble animals (ex: penguins, owls, etc.), while others were decorated exclusively with pyrography to depict stories or vignettes including people. Despite the many uses of gourds for indigenous peoples in the past and present in Ecuador and Peru, these gourds were purely decorative. These items appealed to tourists because they were small, lightweight, and often depicted indigenous people, marking them as indicators of foreign travel.



Figure 5.10 Gourds decorated with pyrography were a lightweight souvenir found at many stalls in the Plaza de Ponchos. These were imported from Peru. Historically, they were decorated with stories or vignettes featuring people. [Author photo]



Figure 5.11 These gourds, imported from Peru, were decorated with a combination of paint and pyrography to resemble animals. Penguins, owls, and guinea pigs are shown here. [Author photo]

Small llamas made from wool or alpaca fleece and decorated with colorful yarn and seeds were also made in Peru (See Figure 5.12). These llamas were sold as small figurines or keychains. Nearly every stall in the market carried them, and they were popular among tourists because they were small, cheap, lightweight, and seemed representative of the Andes (even though llamas the animals are rare in Ecuador). Because they were made cheaply in Peru, no effort had been made to reproduce them in Ecuador, and vendors were quite open about their origin, if asked. There were also hand-embroidered tapestries used as wall hangings or for pillowcases or cushions that were produced in Peru (See Figure 5.13). These were more expensive because of the production technique, so few vendors carried them, which allowed them to stand out as unique to potential buyers. Tourists were often drawn to them and commented on how interesting or unique they were, but rarely purchase the tapestries because they were

large, heavy, and expensive. To uninformed consumers, the hand-embroidered tapestries appeared unique, while to informed consumers, the different style would indicate they were not locally produced, even if tourists were unable to determine their origin as Peruvian.



Figure 5.12 Small, cheap items were often grouped together at the corner of stalls to encourage impulse purchases, especially from children. Here, llama keychains are strung across a rope and down a pole. Underneath, there are bracelets and small llama dolls made from alpaca fleece. [Author photo]



Figure 5.13 Large hand-embroidered tapestries used as wall hangings or for pillowcases or cushions were produced in Peru. These were expensive and eye catching because the style visually differs from Otavalan textiles. [Author photo]

The biggest change in the origin of items between my pre-dissertation research in 2014 and my dissertation research in 2017 and 2018 was the number of mass-produced items imported from China that were being sold in the Plaza de Ponchos. A series of trade agreements often described as a “strategic partnership” between Ecuador and China began under former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa (most notably in 2013 and 2015) and continued under the Ecuadorian President Lenín Moreno were intended to renegotiate debt, open new loans, increase the flow of trade goods without tariffs, and increase tourism. The reception and impact of these agreements has been mixed. Some scholars have criticized the trade agreements as debt-trap diplomacy that will ensnare Ecuador in future debt to China. Some worry that the influx of cheap Chinese imports will undercut comparable local goods and hurt local sectors of the economy, while others argue that the cheap imported items promote competition that is beneficial to Ecuadorians

with limited discretionary funds. The effects of these trade agreements could be seen when walking around the Plaza de Ponchos, which formerly displayed local goods and items imported from Latin America, which were often handmade and/or produced by indigenous peoples. While those items were still offered, they were quickly being eclipsed by mass-produced Chinese imported items.

Walking around the Plaza de Ponchos in 2017 and 2018, I observed that many vendors were now carrying drinking glasses, shot glasses, pens, keychains, and other small items in response to consumer demand and in hopes of making a few small sales. These items were mass-produced in China. It was quite recognizable even to uninformed tourists that these items are not locally made or artisanal in any way. Because these items were not hand crafted, they have the potential to alter the reputation of the Plaza de Ponchos, which is a major tourist destination for visitors from around the globe in large part due to its reputation as an artisan market (See Chapter 6 for local mestizos debating this). Additionally, the economic return on each of these items was very small. However, it was often a more realistic vending strategy for vendors to rely on several small sales than a few large sales in order to succeed economically, which was how most vendors explained carrying and marketing these items.

Occasionally, vendors would insist the Chinese goods were locally produced, such as this multi-functional piece of clothing that a few vendors carried in 2017 and by 2018, could be found at most stalls and even in stores surrounding the Plaza de Ponchos (See Figure 5.14). This versatile item can be worn as a hat, shawl, poncho, scarf, or neck warmer, depending on how one folds, rolls, and unfolds the fabric. Vendors also told me that ladies who are quite thin can wear it as a skirt or dress. Vendors told me these were originally imported from China, but since they sold well, they were now being produced locally. While this was possible, no one was able to identify a local production site. Given the quality of the textile and the prevalence in stores, it appeared that these items continued to be produced in China and imported into Ecuador.

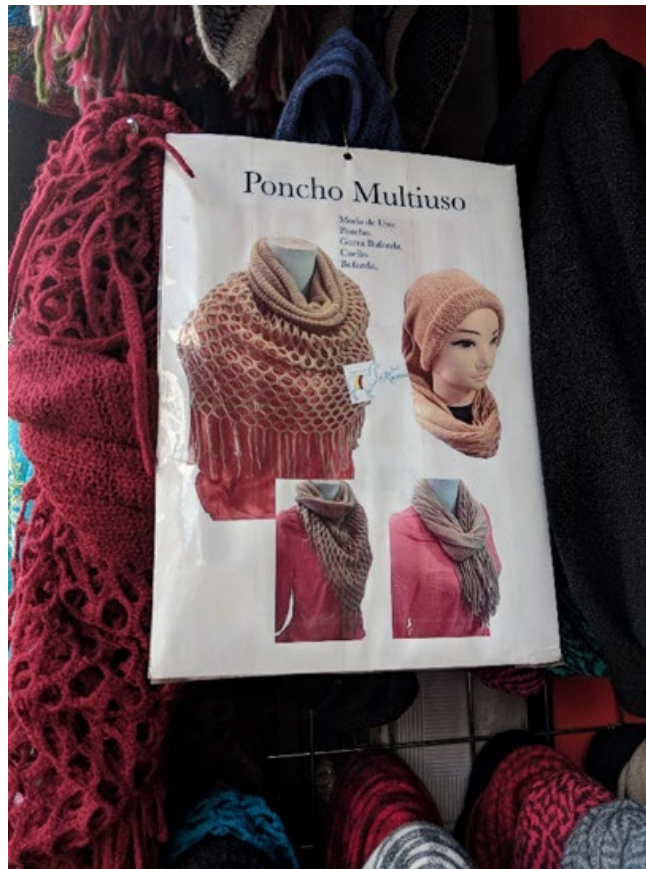


Figure 5.14 This multi-functional piece of clothing produced in China demonstrates an influx of foreign goods that are sometimes presented as locally produced. It was carried by a few vendors in 2017, but by 2018, it could be found at most stalls and even in stores surrounding the Plaza de Ponchos. [Author photo]

In fact, most vendors were incredibly reluctant to acknowledge that any items were produced in China to a much stronger degree than the items produced in Latin American countries. This is not surprising, given the widespread anti-Chinese sentiments and xenophobia in Latin America as are expressed widely, also, in North America. When vendors did disclose that some vendors bought some goods from China, they contended that most of the items in the market were still produced locally. Some vendors would assert that while imported goods existed in the market, they did not personally carry items from China, which was not always accurate. Nearly all vendors expressed a preference for locally made (meaning Ecuadorian or Latin American) goods and a dislike of Chinese goods in the marketplace. Lucia was unique in indicating that she did not have any goods from China at the time (which was inaccurate), but she that would like to

purchase some so she could have a mixture of items to appeal to different tourists. When I commented that the imported items were cheaper, she told me no, they were about the same as locally produced items, but the different styles appealed to different customers. Her assertion about price seemed inconsistent with other conversations and observations, but it may be reflective of differing price points based on quantity purchased.

Many of the mass-produced Chinese items were purchased by Otavalan vendors in Quito or from middlemen who brought the items from Quito to the market in Otavalo. Lucia had travelled alone by bus to Quito to purchase tablecloths imported from China, and she found the solo trip to be long, exhausting, and boring (See Figure 5.15). While chatting at her stall in the market, she explained the necessity of carrying the Chinese tablecloths: “we have to have everything customers might want in order to make sales” [translated by author]. Shoppers wanted them, and in fact, they seemed to purchase the imported lace-style of tablecloth more than the other two styles of tablecloths that were produced in Ecuador (the hand-embroidered and the machine woven checkered design). Lucia and I both observed it was likely that the Chinese tablecloths were the best-selling tablecloths because they were the cheapest option. They actually say “made in China” on them, but Lucia did not draw attention to that and said she did not know if customers realized the tablecloths were from China or not. She imagined that they do not really care because they liked the style, and they liked the price. She told me that locals and foreigners alike bought these tablecloths. Although she did not outright say so, it seemed from my observations that locals were more likely to know the tablecloths were imported, while foreigners may or may not be aware. Her husband José often questioned Lucia (the main vendor at the nuclear family/household unit’s stall in the market) about why they carried these Chinese tablecloths at their stall and expressed his dislike of having them among their stock, but Lucia said they were important to have because they offered variety in the selection of items and because they sold so well.

Imported crafts are often recognizably mass-produced, while locally produced crafts are often envisioned to be handmade handicrafts, which is increasingly not the case. Various imported crafts sold alongside locally produced crafts simultaneously challenge notions of authenticity as vendors strive to meet foreign tourists’ expectations.



Figure 5.15 These lacy, embroidered tablecloths were produced in China, and actually have a label that says, “made in China.” They were sold in the Plaza de Ponchos, alongside tablecloths produced in Peguche. [Author photo]

5.1.2 Otavalan Women as Vendors

In addition to their stalls in the Plaza de Ponchos in Otavalo, some vendors traveled throughout the country to sell goods at other markets in Ecuador. This builds on the tradition of *mindalâes*, a historical social class of long-distance traders, who operated throughout Latin America, with documentation dating as far back as the 1500s. Today, popular destinations include coastal markets – especially those in Guayaquil, and other highland markets – like those in Quito and Cuenca. Because Quito is roughly two hours away by bus, some vendors and producer-vendors sold goods in Quito during the week and returned to Otavalo for Wednesday and/or Saturday market days. The other Ecuadorian markets are farther away, so vendors must make calculated decisions about which market will offer the best chance at sales. Typically, Saturday is the biggest market day at markets throughout Ecuador, but there are also local festivals and celebrations that create peak market days at different sites. Ana Lucia periodically traveled to markets in Cuenca and along the coast between August to March. These are slower months for sales in Otavalo but align with cruise ship visits along the coast and local festivals in Cuenca. This system worked well for Ana Lucia, as it allowed her to gain experience vending in other markets and increased opportunities to make sales when the Otavalan market was

slow. While Ana Lucia enjoyed vending in other Ecuadorian markets, many other vendors preferred to remain in Otavalo, where they had established relationships among the vending community in the Plaza de Ponchos.

As is well-documented in the literature (for example Kyle 1999; Kyle 2000), Otavaleños are embedded in transnational vending, which often utilizes kin networks. In “Otavalo Trade Diaspora,” David Kyle (1999) credits two significant works (Parsons 1945; Collier and Buitrón 1949) with elevating some Otavalans’ social capital on an international scale. This international recognition expanded vending networks dating back to *mindaláes*. Otavalans are not alone in their transnational labor network, as Kingsolver and Balasundaram observe that labor diasporas are a global phenomenon for mountain regions: “The mountains are everywhere, in that marginalized mountain zones have long exported people in far-reaching (largely invisible, to mainstream media) labor diasporas, and those mountain travelers have contributed cultural aesthetics and skills to many flatland contexts” (2018:13). Kyle argues the elevation of some Otavalan social capital on an international scale – along with the need to seek out new, competitive markets – launched the largescale global trade networks he observed in his research (1999; 2000), and that we continue to see today. It was most common for young couples or single men to travel abroad as vendors. International vendors typically originated from families with more social capital and established transnational networks, which determined where the vendors would travel and helped them establish vending routines abroad. Who may become a transnational vendor relates to market knowledge and how vendors present themselves. I personally spoke with vendors who had relatives selling goods in Colombia, Mexico, Spain, Aruba, Guatemala, Panama, Puerto Rico, USA, and Canada. It was most common for these vendors to sell items in tourist markets abroad, especially those along the coast where cruise ships docked (when applicable). The literature also describes the Netherlands as a major vending site for Otavaleños, but I did not speak with anyone who had relatives or contacts there.



Figure 5.16 Stack of fabric at Peguche production site. The green fabrics at the top of the stack will be used to create bags for the Otavalan market, while the rest of the fabrics will be used for bags sent to markets in Aruba. Notice the different designs in the fabrics, as well as the color choices. [Author photo]

Because of their involvement in global circulations, Otavaleños are attuned to consumer desires. When I visited production sites in Peguche, producers mentioned different color combinations and designs that were popular in different markets (See Figure 5.16). For example, one indigenous couple machine embroidered designs on bags for both local and foreign markets. For bags sent to Aruba, the couple selected different patterned textiles, vibrant colors, and tropical designs (See Figures 5.17, 5.18). Bags that would be sold in the Otavalan market looked like the textiles and designs one saw when walking through the market, that have come to be emblematic of Otavalan textiles. They described the process, saying,

Those for Aruba, we get to be creative. It's bright, what you'd want to see on a sunny beach. Like these designs, here [gesturing to Figure 5.17, a graphic that

hangs on the wall next to the embroidery machine]. And those [bags designed] for here, well, you know the look. You've seen it in the market, that style. The same machine does [the embroidery for both markets] both. But I like it when we work on those for Aruba. We both do. Because we get to play with colors, have fun. We ask each other, will this look good? Will they like it? And we give it a try. Then, we have to wait months to hear [from their relatives vending abroad what sold] when they tell us what they want more of. [Translated by author]

Thus, the producers were keenly aware that consumer desires differ, depending on the markets. While the couple enjoyed the creative challenge of producing bags for a foreign market, there was also a delay between production, shipping, and receiving feedback about consumer response to the designs, whereas they could visit the local market for faster feedback on consumer response.

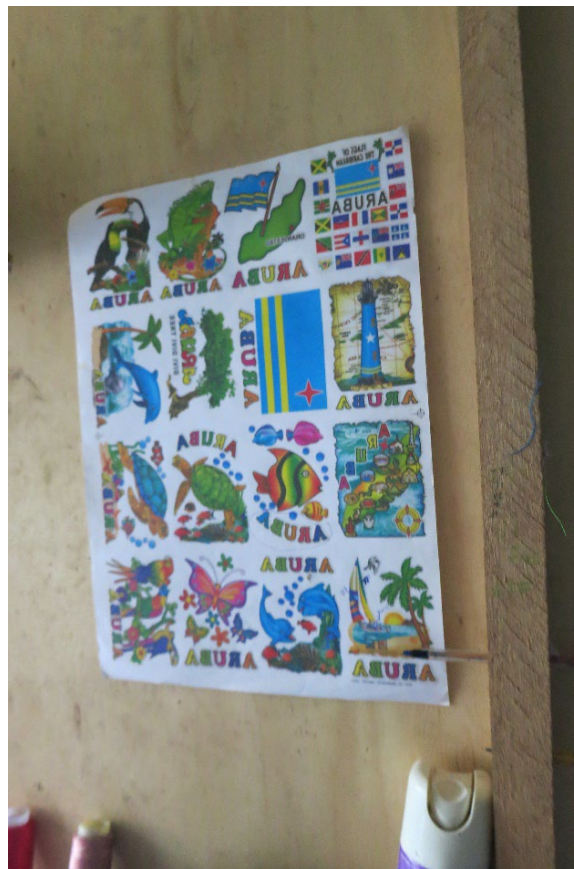


Figure 5.17 Aruba embroidery design chart. This chart of Aruba designs hung on the wall next to the computer embroidery machine and served as a visual reference of some of the tropical designs and colors that could be selected to decorate bags that would be sent to markets in Aruba. [Author photo]



Figure 5.18 Embroidered Aruba bag. The bag meant for markets in Aruba showcases a vibrant gecko design and a popular tourism slogan used on the island. [Author photo]

Otavalan vendors living abroad maintain relationships with family members and producers in Otavalo and share lessons that they learn abroad. It was common for vendors living abroad to visit Otavalo once a year to replenish their stock, sometimes bringing crafts from their destination country for relatives to sell in Otavalo. I did not conduct research at any of these markets outside Ecuador, but I have seen Otavalan goods for sale in New York (state), Costa Rica, and Spain during personal travels. Otavalans who vend outside Otavalo – whether in Ecuador or abroad – learn about consumer desires in different locations and about how to present themselves in various markets as they travel outside their communities and are influenced by global trends. Some lessons pertain to what items will sell in different markets, as was evidenced in the description of bags for markets in Aruba, highlighting the different niches vendors fill in different markets. Other lessons likely pertain to interacting with vendors and tourists from different communities and how those populations perceive them, although I do not have personal knowledge of this. Still, traveling to vend in other communities exposes some vendors to sharing market spaces with non-Otavalans and their perceptions of Otavalans amid shifting global market niches, something that vendors in Otavalo were beginning to deal with as a result of the Venezuelan refugee crisis in 2018. Vendors may draw on kin networks to begin vending outside of Otavalo, but deciding which markets – whether in

Ecuador or abroad – they think will be most beneficial and how they can meet niche market demands amid differing perceptions of them as indigenous vendors has implications not only for themselves but also for their families.

5.1.3 Otavalan Women’s Market Days

To explain the gendered work of vendors at the Plaza de Ponchos, I have chosen to follow an Otavalan woman’s market day from waking early to get ready for the market, through setting up and displaying goods, through spending time with her community of vendors crafting identity through her dress, sales, and portable handmade craft production, until she tears down her stall to return home and rest in the evening.

5.1.3.1 Getting Ready and Traveling to the Market

During the week, vendors typically woke up “at dawn,” between 5-6 A.M. On Saturdays, vendors would awake as early as 3-4 A.M. They prepared food and ate breakfast, often while it was still dark outside, and their homes were still chilled from the night air. Many vendors quickly tended to their home, completing tasks like making a grocery list of items to pick up during the day or putting away laundry that was drying. Those with young children also ensured their children would have everything they needed for school. Vendors often left home before their children were awake, so they would leave a covered plate of food on the table to be sure their children had a good breakfast. After these quick chores, vendors took the bus, a taxi, or caught a ride with someone heading to the market, piling in the back of a pickup truck, to start their workday in the Plaza de Ponchos. Because children attended school either in the morning or in the afternoon, it was not uncommon for children to accompany their mothers to the market. Sometimes, men would also accompany the women to the market to help set up the stall. While most of Otavalo was still sleeping, Peguche was bustling, with vendors headed to market.

5.1.3.2 Accessing Vending Space in a Changing Market

The market at the Plaza de Ponchos has existed since the 1930s, although it originally catered to locals before becoming the tourist market of today (for example, see Meisch 2002:33). The permanent concrete kiosks pictured below (See Figure 5.19) were erected in the 1970s with foreign investment from the Dutch government, signaling the shift to a tourist market (Meisch 2002:40; Kyle 1999:428). All around the concrete kiosks, vendors erect tables and tents, with the market filling with vendors on the major market days of Wednesdays and Saturdays. The largest market day is Saturday, when vendors spill into the streets for several blocks in every direction. On Trip Advisor's "Things to Do in Otavalo," the market is listed as the number one suggestion under the name "Otavalo Market," with an average rating of 4.0 from over 1,000 reviews (Things to Do in Otavalo). It is listed again as the number seventeen suggestion of "Things to Do in Otavalo" under the name "Plaza de los Ponchos Mercado," with an average rating of 4.5 from 200 reviews; this latter listing is also the number one recommendation for "Shopping in Otavalo" (Things to Do in Otavalo; Plaza de los Ponchos Mercado). It is interesting that the market is listed twice, under two different names. First time tourists who are unfamiliar with Otavalo likely would not realize these separate listings are the same location. Further, the reviews for "Otavalo Market" reference souvenirs, shopping, and describe the market as "touristy," while reviews for "Plaza de los Ponchos Mercado" reference culture, handicrafts, and dress, suggesting that the English and Spanish names of the listing may prime visitors to experience the same market differently (Otavalo Market; Plaza de los Ponchos Mercado). The Trip Advisor describes the "Otavalo Market" as "This colorful Indian market takes place each Saturday and features some of the finest woven products in the region including ponchos, sweaters, wall hangings and shawls" (Otavalo Market). The "About" section under the "Plaza de los Ponchos Mercado" listing is blank.



Figure 5.19 View of the Plaza de Ponchos from above, showing the expanse of vendors' stalls, covered in tarps and sheets to protect from the rain and sun. [Author photo]

The competition for market space is intense, and most plots have been passed through the same family for multiple generations. It can also be costly to rent space within the market. There is a two-tier payment system to rent space in the Plaza de Ponchos. Vendors must first pay an annual fee to “own” access to a particular space (they rent the space from the municipal government, but they described this relationship as “owning” the space) and then pay a daily fee for every day which they occupy the space. Vendors pay a daily fee to use the space only when they are present, and they pay per amount of space they use. If neighboring vendors were absent, it was common for vendors to use their neighbors’ space and pay for the use of the additional space. Municipal workers walk through the market, collecting daily fees from vendors. The municipal workers circulated for the better part of the day, but most vendors preferred to pay the fee later in the day, after they had made some sales.

Vendors have different strategies of best utilizing their skills at selling, depending on the resources available to them. The goal for most vendors was to “own” their space with a partner – usually a spouse or parent(s) – and work there together. Because it could be difficult and pricey to obtain a space, some vendors would sublet space from others, who often lived abroad to sell items in other markets. Those with the fewest resources may begin honing their skills as vendors by working for vendors who own their own

space and are in need of employees. Often, these families had a shortage of workers because family members were involved in transnational vending networks, so they would hire non-relatives to work at their stalls in the Plaza de Ponchos. Ana Lucia worked at a non-relative's stall for nearly two decades before leveraging her experience and knowledge into renting a space of her own. Because of this, she initially carried a very small supply of items compared to other vendors and has been slowly working on growing her inventory. She was the last of her many siblings who vend in the Plaza de Ponchos (some siblings sell crafts in other markets) to have a space of her own, so her family often teased her. It was easy to see why she was excited to be able to work on her own, proud that she was able to add more items bit by bit to her stall.

After Ana Lucia began vending on her own, her nephew Javier began working for her former employer. This surprised me because Javier's mother, Lucia, was a very successful vendor with several spaces in the market and has long relied on the help of her children (one daughter now sells items in Colombia; one daughter has her own stall in the market; her two youngest children still help Lucia) to make sales. However, Lucia was supportive of Javier's employment, explaining that it was important for a young man to have work experience, be independent, and be able to make his own money. She also took this as a positive sign because Javier has never expressed much interest in being a vendor. In fact, he has outright said that he does not want a future as a vendor and would instead like to be a medical doctor.

On one day in July, Jazmin's neighbors in the market did not come, so both Jazmin and her sister Ana Lucia were able to have extra vending space. Because of their expanded stall space, they were able to put more goods on display. Both women told me they were very happy because July is prime tourism season and they thought the increased display space would lead to more sales – or at least, an increased opportunity to make sales. However, if vendors spread out too much, they run the risk of overextending themselves while keeping an eye out for tourists from different points of access.

Upon visiting the Plaza de Ponchos during the summer of 2017, I noticed several changes to the market, which were confirmed by the vendors. For years, the biggest market day in terms of both vendors and visitors has been Saturday. The second busiest day is Wednesday, when many tour groups from Quito visit Otavalo for the day. Sunday

and Monday are usually the slowest days, with the fewest vendors and visitors in the market. This still held true, but the number of vendors in the market on the other weekdays has increased during the peak tourism summer months. I noted: there are a lot of vendors in the market – more than I remember on a typical weekday. All the stalls were full and there were even some vendors in the street. Yet, there did not seem to be a lot of customers in the market, which the vendors often lamented to me. Thus, the competition among vendors is increasing, even as the number of tourists appears to be declining – a fear which the vendors frequently discussed.

Concepción is a resilient woman who has faced the stigma of being a single mom to a rambunctious young teen. She is in her early thirties, lives in Peguche with her parents, and works with them to sell goods in the Plaza de Ponchos. She is incredibly hardworking, candid, and well-informed of local politics and global current events. More than a research interlocutor, I consider her a dear friend. Concepción often brought local current events to my attention during our conversations. She told me that roughly two years ago, the local government proposed to change the layout of the Plaza de Ponchos. Their plan was to remove the circular concrete stalls, called “*redondos*” by vendors, and make stalls a uniform 1 meter in length with vendors back-to-back in straight rows. Current stalls ranged from 1.5-2 meters, and while the rows of vendors were relatively straight, the round concrete stalls operated like roundabouts interjected into pathways (See Figure 5.20). Hence, the pathways between stalls and *redondos* do not always connect, which can be quite confusing for visitors. The city believed the renovations would make the Plaza’s layout more efficient and more appealing to tourists, who would then be able to walk in straight lines with clearly demarcated stalls and know the vendors to which they belong. The existing setup prevented people from walking in straight lines, and because it utilized semicircles and circles, it could be difficult for visitors to determine which stalls belong to which vendors and where to go next. Tourists often commented on how difficult it was to navigate and how they get lost walking through the Plaza de Ponchos.



Figure 5.20 Vendors could rent a space in the Plaza de Ponchos that ranged from 1.5-2 meters in length. The spaces were marked with paint on the ground. [Author photo]

However, changing the layout and infrastructure of the market would have negative repercussions for vendors. Limiting stalls to 1 meter in length would mean that vendors could only realistically sell one type of item because they would not have enough space to store and display a variety of items. Concepción said with the existing setup, 2 meters are the absolute minimum space needed, but 4 meters were much better. It was common for vendors to rent multiple spaces to have enough room to display their goods. Concepción was worried about the limited space because she believes that vendors cannot make a living selling only on one type of item. Different tourists want different things, and vendors cannot survive going days or weeks without making sales if the customers during that time period are not interested in what a vendor with a restricted selection of goods has to offer. I would imagine this change would also disrupt producers, who often produced multiple types of similar items and were also often vendors in the market. Because of this, the vendors were fighting the change that would not only impact the material conditions of their work environment, but that would also impact their livelihoods.

Concepción did not know why the local government proposed these changes, but a mestizo businessman who was a member of a coop for crafts told me the city is

proposing the changes to the Plaza de Ponchos to improve city infrastructure and ensure that the layout was not “antiquated.” Given the described changes, it seemed to me as though the proposed changes would allow more vendors in the same amount of space. Since vendors pay to rent the market space, this would likely result in increased revenue for the local government, even if it resulted in fewer sales for the vendors. This proposal was an attempt to control indigenous use of public space without their input or consent. I spoke with some city officials, who declined to comment on the specifics of the proposed project or the backlash from indigenous vendors, but insisted they had the best interests of the city at heart. The Ecuadorian state has long taken the approach that good indigenous peoples are ones that can be controlled, and Otavalans have been considered “model Indians” by the state, as discussed earlier. Describing the government’s response to the strong indigenous movement in the early 2000s, Carmen Martínez Novo writes, “This strategy constructed indigenous people not as actors who might give their support at a given time but with whom the government must negotiate at another time, but as obedient subjects” (2021:54). Thus, the local government’s proposed changes to the Plaza de Ponchos that occurred without the consultation or consent of the indigenous Otavalans who used the space daily exists within a larger framework of “paternalist indigenismo” (Martínez Novo 2021:65).

5.1.3.3 Unpacking and Setting Up the Stall

During the week, vendors arrived at the Plaza de Ponchos between 6-7 A.M. to begin setting up their stalls. On Saturdays, vendors arrived as early as 4:30 or 5 A.M. to set up. Men carried huge bags called “*maletas*” full of goods, which were stored in nearby storage facilities or trucked in, on their backs to the vendor’s empty space (See Figure 5.21). Vendors must set up their table or booth every day, as nothing can be left in the Plaza de Ponchos overnight. Most vendors made use of vertical space with stalls that extended their space upward, typically covered in a plastic tarp or sheet to protect their goods from the rain and sun (See Figure 5.19). Set-up time varied depending on how many items a vendor had, how much they chose to put on display, the stall infrastructure they must erect, how much help they had, and how quickly they worked, but it generally

took 2-3 hours to fully set up a stall. Several of the vendors mentioned how physically taxing and tiring it was to set up their stalls every day, which I experienced whenever I assisted them. Some vendors preferred to arrive early and have everything in place before potential customers arrived, so their attention will not be split. Other vendors preferred to take their time setting up while simultaneously interacting with customers, multitasking to make the most of their time or make the day pass faster.



Figure 5.21 Men carried huge bags called “*maletas*” full of goods on their backs to the vendor’s empty space every morning and returned the *maletas* to storage facilities every evening. [Author photo]

5.1.3.4 Displaying Selected Goods

The selection of goods that a vendor had at her disposal and what she put on display as the selection of goods for customers to browse involved important strategic decisions. Many vendors preferred to offer a variety of items to accommodate the different tastes of shoppers. While sitting together in the market, Karla described her stall by saying, “we don’t have a lot of anything, but we have a little of everything,” which

allowed them to make sales. She and her husband explained that when they search for items for their stall, “we want the best price, but also consistent quality. Not the best quality, but consistent quality. Because tourists can tell” [translated by author]. While many vendors indicated the importance of both price and quality, the couple was unique in indicating that consistent quality was more important than the highest quality. Yet, as they explained when showing a variety of the same item to a tourist, it would be rather noticeable if some were of higher- and others of lower-quality, which would reflect poorly on the vendor. Therefore, different vendors made different considerations regarding quality, quantity, price, and variety for their selection of goods.

In 2017, Ana Lucia only carried embroidered items at her stall. It seemed at the time that she was adopting a different strategy than most people in the market – specializing in a particular item or type of items rather than offer a small selection of a wide variety of goods. That strategy worked for some vendors and would make sense because she hand-embroidered items herself, so she could highlight the craftsmanship and artisan perspective that certain customers desire. However, her “strategy” was mostly based on limited resources. Since it was her first year selling items on her own, rather than working for hire, she had “specialized” in embroidered items only because that was all she could afford at the time. It was unclear why she chose to start with hand-embroidered items, given that they were some of the more expensive items and therefore more difficult to sell. Because they were on white and cream cotton-linen cloth, they also were more susceptible to discoloration from the sun and dirt carried by wind. Ana Lucia explained her choice only by saying she thought they were pretty, and consumers seem to like them. An added benefit was that she could purchase plain cloth to hand embroider while vending in the market, thus adding to her stock while passing time. Still, Ana Lucia told me that she wants to buy the newer style blankets that usually feature llamas next to be able to sell them at her stall. She said it was hard to make sales regularly without a variety of items, and she believed the blankets are very popular.

Because of her limited resources, Ana Lucia had a higher starting price and a higher minimum sale price that she was willing to accept, when compared to most other vendors in the market. Although she faced some criticism from other vendors, Ana Lucia’s vending strategies stemmed from recently becoming an independent vendor

whose money was tied up in the initial investments that she must recoup. In other words, she believed she could not afford to sell items for lower prices like her family members because that would diminish her profits. In comparison to Ana Lucia's family members who also vend in the Plaza de Ponchos, her sister Lucia and her niece Concepción (who works together with Concepción's father) made the most sales out of the entire family, and as such, they expected to make multiple sales daily; when they did not, they would get frustrated/disappointed. However, it was quite common for Ana Lucia to sell one or no items in a day. In fact, Concepción would often work hard to make sales on Ana Lucia's behalf for fear that her aunt could not survive as a vendor without help.

To supplement the number of items a vendor must purchase outright to resell, many vendors had established working relationships with other vendors and nearby stores that allowed them to borrow items to offer to customers. This was especially advantageous for vendors because the items were on loan, which they did not have to repay until they sold the items. This process sometimes confused customers – especially those with limited Spanish skills – who did not understand why a vendor would say they could provide the requested item, and then the vendor would leave their stall (to borrow the item from elsewhere). Sometimes, customers left before the vendor returned. Vendors also worried that new customers may arrive and leave while their stall is unattended, so they often preferred to have two vendors per stall or a good relationship with a neighbor in the market who could watch their stall. When the customer did not buy the borrowed item, the vendor would once again leave her stall to return the item. This can further confuse customers who felt like they were seeing the same people and items around the market because that was exactly what was happening. Still, this was a better system for vendors than purchasing a specific item a customer inquired after, since there was no guarantee that customer would purchase said item.

Once a vendor had selected the goods she would offer in her stock, she then determined the best manner in which to display these goods when setting up her stall to present a visually appealing display that made the best use of space and enticed customers by hinting at the variety available. As Concepción explained, items were folded when displayed in stalls to give tourists a view of the colors and patterns available. Items were unfolded when packed in *maletas* to better fit the large bags for transport. The

act of folding items to be displayed every morning and unfolding items to be packed every evening was time consuming and labor intensive. Throughout the day, some vendors would alter which items were on display, hoping that by refreshing their displays, customers would be enticed to make purchases. This served as a distraction for vendors, and to customers, it created a sense of activity at a particular stall. Karla readily employed this vending strategy because “Sometimes it works!” [translated by author].

In addition to making sure a nice selection of items was on display, vendors must also consider the impact of the natural environment on their goods. Sunlight causes items – especially textiles – to fade or be discolored. Goods that get wet from rain can lose their structural integrity or grow mold or mildew if not dried properly. Dust brought by wind can be abrasive to items or make light colored textiles look dirty and dingy. Typically, vendors decided in the morning when setting up what they thought would be the main weather concern for the day. This was often a central topic of discussion among vendors, especially those who anticipated different kinds of weather. Once items were on display, a great deal of energy was spent protecting them. If vendors anticipated a sunny or windy day, they would put up a cloth or sheet to protect their goods. If they anticipated rain, they would put up a tarp or sheet of plastic. Most vendors tried to minimize their use of plastic tarps because the wind can easily shred them, so they must constantly purchase new tarps, which was costly. On one rainy day, Lucia was busy making sure all of her products stayed dry. Even though she had plastic covering most of her items, she still had some items that were exposed to the rain. At one point, her son Javier came over to tie his plastic tarp on the *redondo*'s center pole because he had not put up a tarp that morning. Lucia told me that the vendors were not consulted before the concrete circular kiosks were constructed, but they still worked fairly well to meet the vendors' needs. For example, they have small knob-like protrusions from which vendors were able to hang items for display or tie ropes for their sheets or plastic tarps that covered and protected their goods.

5.1.3.5 Communicating with Tourists and Fellow Vendors

Those with experience in customer service will know that communication skills are a vital skill set. Otavalan vendors must use different languages and registers to communicate with tourists, tour guides, and fellow vendors. When possible, vendors communicated in Spanish and limited English with tourists and tour guides to make sales and encourage repeat customers. Vendors were more likely to communicate with fellow vendors in Kichwa to establish and maintain a sense of community. Yet, vendors often faced challenges when communicating with both tourists and vendors in the market.

Whenever they saw someone white, the vendors would look to me or the family member who spoke the most English to help – sometimes even asking or telling me things to ask or tell the tourists – assuming everyone who is white speaks English and is from the U.S. or Great Britain. Sometimes this worked but often it did not. From my experience, there were many tourists from Germany, France, and the Netherlands, who visited Otavalo and did not speak English. Because vendors must read the customer, sometimes their assumptions about white tourists undermined their success. For instance, vendors would often push sweaters and cool weather items like hats and scarves for white tourists. Those from California and the southern U.S. often found Otavalan weather to be chilly, so they sought out these items. However, tourists from Great Britain or Germany often found Otavalan weather warm, so they were less interested in these items. Still, I found I was glad they saw me as an asset and not a hindrance; sometimes, I worried if I raised questions of authenticity for tourists when they saw a white girl hanging out with *indígenas*.

Concepción was the most talkative of her family. She was also the most inquisitive about learning more English, even though she knew many words, could generally pronounce them well, and could sometimes understand tourists speaking English (the pace of natural conversations was often too fast for those less comfortable with English). Out of her family, only her sister Veronica had stronger English language skills. Both women were in their late twenties to early thirties, and were successful vendors, in part because of their language skills. Veronica often expressed her desire to learn languages, including English, French, and German. She regretted not caring about English when she was in school, now that she knew how useful it would be as a vendor and how difficult it was to learn languages as adults, which seemed to be a common

theme among vendors. While still students, many Otavaleños did not care about the English they were forced to study, but as adults, they wished they were more fluent and regretted not working on it more. Despite the admonitions of their elders, this pattern seemed to be continuing. From my observations, many children who were currently in school did not find their English studies important and often gave that subject little attention. As they grow older, their relatives warned that the children may grow to regret that approach.

Vendors often spoke to one another in Kichwa or a mixture of Kichwa and Spanish. Because of the pressure to learn Spanish at school and use it as the official language, many Otavaleños found their Kichwa was lacking. In fact, many families prioritized Spanish to provide their children with more opportunities and to limit the prejudice and discrimination they faced as indigenous peoples, which has led an entire generation to have limited knowledge and practice of Kichwa. Marleen Haboud is an Ecuadorian linguist who has described the variation in use and attitudes toward Kichwa, noting that many young Otavalans speak little Kichwa (2004).

It was common for vendors and me to discuss our families during our time together. One day while visiting with Alicia and Emilia in the market, Alicia told me about her son who attends a university in Quito. She said, “They told him to speak in Kichwa during class. But he can’t. They didn’t believe him. He said, no, really! Then he called me after. He was so embarrassed” [translated by author] that he is Otavalan and could not speak what should have been his native tongue. Alicia reassured him, “It’s not your fault. You don’t have to know everything. You’re there to learn. So, learn [Kichwa, too]” [translated by author]. Alicia explained to me that she and her husband spoke only in Spanish in the house because “in the past, the indigenous people were given a hard time for using Kichwa and not learning Spanish” [translated by author]. Unfortunately, now her son needed to use Kichwa for his education, but he was struggling to learn it as a young adult. This issue was particularly important to Alicia’s family because her mother was illiterate in Spanish and fought very hard for her children and grandchildren to learn Spanish – especially written Spanish – so that they could survive and be respected. Alicia told me: “My mom was illiterate, but she learned to speak Spanish from contact with them [mestizos and whites in town]” [translated by author].

Written Spanish is necessary for official legal and business proceedings. Since indigenous Otavalans speak Kichwa – a language with no internal standardized written form – as their first language, they often found themselves at a disadvantage. Alicia explained her opinion of the relationship between language and respect(ability):

In the past, indigenous Otavalans didn't work in stores because we were seen as inferior. Back then, whites [and mestizos] had the best of everything. Around thirty years ago, it started to change. Now, indigenous people work in stores, import/export goods, work in tourism, and have [own and operate] hotels. For example, in the past, whites [and mestizos] saw indigenous people – they treated indigenous people as lesser, especially in schools. When we went to school, we weren't as prepared [for education in Spanish because indigenous Otavalans spoke Kichwa at home and in their communities]. So, they thought indigenous people were bad students, were dumb. So, education was important [for proving intellectual abilities and for opening opportunities]. Then, we entered politics – especially in Cotacachi – and their ideas [about indigenous people] changed. [Translated by author].

Alicia noted a lack preparedness for formal education as an explanation whites and mestizos had used in the past to justify their racism. A lack of education has been used as a scapegoat elsewhere in the Andes to mask racism toward indigenous peoples. Writing about Peru, Alcalde notes: “The denial of the existence of racism naturalizes and helps perpetuate forms of internal Othering, which are often justified in terms of a lack of ‘culture’ or ‘education’ to avoid recognizing and admitting racism” (2022:63). Alicia’s comment highlights how Otavaleños have worked to actively upend this racist mindset, which highlights the significance many Otavalans place on formal education and the respect and opportunities that arise from completing formal educational milestones.

Because of past discrimination and the need for Spanish literacy, many indigenous people prioritized Spanish over Kichwa. Alicia and her husband have exclusively spoken Spanish in the house to reinforce its importance for public interactions, which did not provide their children with an opportunity to learn Kichwa, as they focused on the official state language. Unfortunately, it is much harder to learn a language as a teenager or adult than as a child, so her son was struggling. Many indigenous Otavalan individuals and families found themselves in similar situations.

Alicia’s story prompted her friend and neighboring vendor in the Plaza de Ponchos, Emilia, to share her own story about language and acceptance. Emilia did not

know Kichwa when she first came to Otavalo and began vending in the market. Alicia interjected, “The other vendors teased her about this. It was bad. But I helped [teach her Kichwa]” [translated by author]. As a producer-vendor, Emilia needed to interact with other vendors who wanted to purchase goods from her. Because these clients only spoke Kichwa, Emilia had to learn quickly: “I had no choice. I had to learn. It was hard” [translated by author]. Emilia explained, “My parents moved to Quito when I was two to find work. I grew up there and only came back to Otavalo when I married” [translated by author]. During many conversations, Emilia indicated that she felt isolated living in Quito and has found it challenging to learn Kichwa as an adult. She was less fluent than she would like. I often joked that my Kichwa language skills were that of a toddler because I knew useful words, but I did not know the grammar enough to construct meaningful sentences. One time when I made a comment about my Kichwa language level, Emilia told me, “I’m not much better. Ugh it’s bad. I know what I need to... But it’s embarrassing to speak like a child” [translated by author]. For Emilia, Kichwa language and indigenous identity are connected, and her personal struggles with the Kichwa language were related to her struggle to feel fully integrated in the Otavalan community as an indigenous woman, despite spending her formative years in Quito.

Kichwa has generally been described as an historically oral language without a written system,² although it has been standardized since the 1980s, and intercultural education experiences have contributed to the availability of written materials today. Still, the Otavalans with whom I spoke told me that Kichwa was not a written language, so it was difficult for younger generations to learn the grammatical rules. Although some young people are learning Kichwa through their formal education, that was not the case for the majority of Otavalans with whom I spoke. While it may be easier to pick up vocabulary if you hear it all the time, since Kichwa is rarely written, it is quite hard to study intensively, so people tend to learn it passively or informally. This seemed to be the case for the number of families who focused on Spanish as the linguistic priority. This meant that people of my generation and younger had very limited experience using

² Salomon (2004, 2008) has argued that khipus and textiles in the pre-Columbian era were a written system for Kichwa, but prior to this work, scholars and Kichwa speakers have long described Kichwa as an oral language.

Kichwa, therefore, they had lower language skills. Many vendors in their thirties told me they were sad because they felt like they had lost part of their culture or could not communicate with many of the people around them. This has spurred many vendors to make an effort to learn Kichwa and teach what they know to their younger siblings and to their children. I saw the linguistic inconsistencies when speaking to people of my generation or younger who often had to confer with one another or their elders to decide if they knew the right word or phrase.

While at Karla's stall in the Plaza de Ponchos one day, a mestiza woman walked by and asked Karla in Kichwa how much an item cost. Karla was so surprised, she said, "I almost didn't understand. Did you see? I didn't know how to respond" [translated by author]. The woman actually continued the conversation in Kichwa, with Karla answering in Spanish. After the woman left her stall, Karla told me she was shocked because that was the first time a mestizo person had ever spoken with her in Kichwa. She expected to hear other vendors speaking Kichwa but not mestizos. She seemed intrigued rather than upset that the mestiza woman knew and spoke Kichwa, commenting "her Kichwa is better than mine!" [translated by author].

Karla told me that her generation – Karla, her siblings, and their cousins – did not know Kichwa very well. She told me, "For the most part, we understand it but, but we cannot speak it very well. When we were kids, our parents didn't speak Kichwa much in the house. I heard it when we were out, but not at home" [translated by author]. In fact, she told me that she only learned to speak Kichwa in the market from other vendors who were surprised that she and her siblings did not know it and offered to teach them. Because of this, she and her husband talked to their daughter (who was 3 months old at the time of this conversation) exclusively in Kichwa when they were in their house. She said, "Here [in the market], we use Spanish. But at home, we try to speak only Kichwa to her. I know it's silly. She's still a baby. But we want her to know it. It's better to start now, not like us [who learned as adults]. And it's good practice for us, too" [translated by author]. It was important to them that their daughter learns Kichwa from a young age so she would not have to struggle to learn like Karla and others of her generation did. Throughout my research trips, I have observed that older generations tend to be more reliant on Kichwa and younger generations tend to be more comfortable with Spanish,

perhaps because of their formal education in Spanish. Shifting to the appropriate language is essential for completing transactions and maintaining relationships, but it can also be crucial for one's identity as an indigenous Otavalan.

5.1.3.6 Vending Strategies and Market Knowledge

A key form of market knowledge a vendor must possess is how to read the potential customer in hopes of making a sale. This skill is refined with experience and “instinct,” according to Concepción. Despite spending months in the market with vendors and listening to their tips, I found my skill at reading customers to be inconsistent. A good vendor must anticipate the kinds of items customers want, who they are shopping for, and how much they are willing to pay. Although vendors sometimes misread the situation, more often than not, they anticipated a customer's needs correctly. This did not always result in a sale, but a positive interaction may lead to a sale with another customer nearby or may earn a vendor a positive reputation, which was important for networking among vendors. This is best illustrated by specific interactions I observed and sometimes participated in during my time in the market in 2017 and 2018.

On one instance, Veronica worked to sell a scarf to a white male foreigner, who ultimately walked away empty handed. Veronica knew more English than many of the vendors in the market, and immediately began to say colors and prices in English (with good pronunciations) as soon as she saw the man. One look at his skin tone made her assume that he – like countless other foreigners she has encountered – might not have strong Spanish skills and, at the very least, would appreciate to negotiate in English. In addition to switching languages, Veronica quickly put the scarf in his hand, knowing he would be more likely to purchase something after holding it. This strategy was often successful because customers were impressed with the softness of the textiles, or because they were uncomfortable holding an item and would purchase it out of a sense of obligation. The strategies seemed to work at first, but the man changed his mind and walked away empty handed. Although Veronica correctly read the man's desired item and utilized what she knew from past experiences to be tried and true vending strategies, she did not make the sale.

One day while sitting with Jazmin at her stall, a redheaded man slowed down to look at her items. She immediately jumped up and said, “Pants, sir?” [translated by author], gesturing to cotton pants available at her stall. He then looked to me for help, and the three of us began talking in a mixture of English and Spanish. He had a thick Scottish accent that made understanding him in any language a bit challenging for both Jazmin and me. He was part of a group of backpackers who had been in the highlands for a few days, acclimatizing, before beginning a series of hikes through the Andes Mountains. He was interested in the striped cotton style of pants for loungewear/pajamas on the trip. After he left, I asked Jazmin how she knew to offer the man pants. When I looked at the man, I did not think he was a serious shopper, nor would I have guessed his interest in the cotton lounge pants. She said she saw him looking at the pants as he was walking down another aisle, so she guessed that was what he wanted. She explained that vendors must pay attention to what people are looking at while at one’s own stall and simultaneously keep an eye out for what others are viewing/touching at other stalls as they approach, so a vendor can offer the correct items. Sometimes, customers peruse the item they are interested in while working up the courage to ask a vendor for it. In those cases, the watchful vendor can meet the customer halfway by offering what she already knew the customer wants. Sometimes, however, this strategy did not pay off because customers considered an item and decided against it, which is why they never inquired about it. Jazmin explained, “You just have to divine what they might want,” and hope you guess correctly [translated by author]. Sometimes she guessed correctly, and sometimes she did not. She remarked, “That is just how it goes with this type of work” [translated by author].

As a general vending strategy, Jazmin pushed the \$1 items (bracelets, keychains, and hacky sacks) to nearly everyone who walks by, but especially to children who “might want to purchase something with their own money” [translated by author] or have their parents buy several of the same cheap item for their friends and classmates back home. Jazmin explained that she felt dejected on days she did not make any sales, so this strategy assured that she would almost always make a few small sales every day.

In addition to reading potential customers in terms of what items they might like or how much they were willing to spend, some vendors attempted to anticipate other

customer needs. Concepción only used colored plastic bags – either yellow or multicolor striped – for her items, saying tourists in the past had told her they did not like the black plastic ones that most vendors used. She believed that little touches like colorful shopping bags made a big impact on consumers, so she would spend a few more cents per bag to have something that stood out from other vendors. The bags were a visual marker that bolstered her pride when she saw customers walking around the market carrying a purchase from her stall.

Many vendors relied on humor to quickly establish a sense of rapport with customers that might result in a sale. Jazmin loved to joke with and tease her potential customers and often recalled the comical moments later in the day to help keep her spirits up and pass the time. On one occasion when I was visiting at Jazmin's stall, I witnessed her selling a linen shirt to a Latino middle-aged man. When he found the one he liked and was ready to purchase it, she attempted to increase the number of items she could sell him and asked, "Don't you want a shirt for your lady?" [translated by author]. He laughed and said, "No, we're separated" [translated by author]. Without missing a beat, she responded, "Well maybe this would help you reconcile" [translated by author]. He laughed and said no, sticking to the one shirt for himself. After he walked away, we both laughed at her quick wit and brazen comment. Still laughing at herself, Jazmin said, "What? I had to at least ask!" [translated by author]. She recounted the story several times throughout the day, telling her neighboring vendors and relatives, who all laughed at her quick wit and the unsuspecting customer's response.

Jazmin's sister Lucia was generally more serious in her interactions with customers, but she also used humor to make sales. One day while helping at Lucia's stall, a man walked by and was interested in leather belts that feature a strip of woven textile down the middle. That is, until he heard the price and balked. He asked why they were so expensive, and Lucia replied, "Because they're made of gold. Look right here. They have a little money [in them]" [translated by author]. Her pun about the price as related to the material made us all laugh. Ultimately, the man did not purchase a belt, but her joke made him waver and consider making a purchase.

While some vendors preferred to obscure the origin of their items, relying on stories of handmade craftsmanship, other vendors were more transparent about the items

they sold. These vendors explained that they would rather lose a sale by being honest than close a sale by being dishonest. As they explained, reputation and honesty were important to them because they felt these are a reflection not only of who they were, but also on the market and their community. Often, these vendors grew quite angry when they overheard other vendors manipulating information; it was quite common to overhear vendors calling each other liars, although most tourists did not understand the accusations.

One day I was at Lucia's stall in the market when a middle-aged Latin American couple stopped to ask if the knit children's hooded sweaters at her stall were made by hand. Lucia said, "no, they are made with a machine and then embroidered by hand" [translated by author]. The man glanced at me, and I nodded in agreement. The man seemed to appreciate her honesty and bought a sweater. Some vendors are transparent with all of their customers, while some alter their responses based on their perceptions of the customer. When I spoke with Lucia after the couple left, she said she opts for "honesty always," relying on a reputation of providing the customer with accurate information and "making fair deals" [translated by author]. This strategy worked well for her, as she was quite successful at closing sales and had many repeat customers who remembered her and chose to buy from her again rather than dealing with another vendor. Thus, vendors relied on different vending strategies to be successful in the market. Their skills and knowledge as vendors were valued by indigenous Otavalans, but have not been widely explored in the literature about Otavalan crafts.

5.1.3.7 Performing Visible Female Indigenous Identity

Women are often considered "more Indian," and are expected to serve as gatekeepers of tradition (de la Cadena 1995). Stereotypes about women's appearance and interactions often position women such that they must be living vessels of tradition and indigenous identity. Otavalan women were well aware of these pressures and actively responded to these expectations, often leveraging them for economic gain.

As I have discussed previously, many female indigenous vendors felt pressure to dress *de anaco*, or wear traditional indigenous clothing, to visibly perform their

indigenous identity so that they meet tourists' expectations in an effort to help them make sales. An Otavalan woman dressing *de anaco* wears a white embroidered blouse, two *anacos* – skirts made from large rectangles of fabric wrapped around the body, one or two *fajas* or belts to hold the *anacos* in place, *alpargatas* – open toe sandals, a multistrand gold bead necklace, and coral bracelets made of beads on a long strand that is repeatedly wrapped around one's wrist (See Figure 5.22). Gold or coral colored earrings are also usually worn. Optional is a *fachalina* – a smaller rectangle of fabric that is tied at the shoulder to drape around the torso, or folded into a sort of hat; many women replace the *fachalina* with a sweater or jacket, as it is warmer. She has a single braid extending to the base of her spine, wrapped with a *cinta*, or a long, narrow woven strip of fabric worn as a hair tie. This provides a distinct silhouette that is often depicted in art, dolls, and textiles - especially the famous *chismosas* ["gossipers"] motif – all of which are for sale in the market (See Figures 5.23, 5.24). As described earlier, Otavalan women vendors often produced portable handmade crafts – like crocheting, knitting, embroidery, jewelry, etc. – in the market. Portable handmade crafts were impactful in the performance of female indigeneity for tourists visiting the Plaza de Ponchos in Otavalo, while they were simultaneously viewed by Otavalans as less significant craft production than weaving textiles on floor looms or via machinated hand weaving. Thus, indigenous Otavalan women's identity was for sale along with and through their crafts.



Figure 5.22 Modified photovoice photo, taken by one of my interlocutors, showing her sister dressed *de anaco* at a festival held at the site of a former *obraje* in Peguche.



Figure 5.23 Modified photovoice photo taken by Alicia, depicting an Otavalan woman doll propping up an in-progress apron, hand-embroidered with the *chismosas* design.



Figure 5.24 Modified photovoice photo taken by Alicia, showing a doll sold in the Plaza de Ponchos that depicts indigenous Otavalan women's *de anaco* dress.

Indigenous artisans must look “traditional and authentic and humble” (Shlossberg 2015:4); when vendors do not fulfill these ideas, they are less likely to make a sale because consumers perceive them as ‘inauthentic’ and only seeking to make a profit. This also highlights some of the preference for women to primarily be the vendors in the Plaza de Ponchos, as they are more easily recognized by uninformed tourists as being indigenous or Other because of their dress than indigenous men who have long hair (a marker of indigeneity that locals understand but foreigners often do not) but often dress in Western clothing.

One day in June 2014, I witnessed quite an unusual transaction: A woman bought Lucia's *faja* – the one she was wearing! A middle-aged blonde woman and her teenage daughter were looking at Lucia's stall. The mother seemed interested in purchasing something, but Lucia could not figure out what, so she kept showing the shopper a little bit of everything. The daughter was embarrassed and walked over to talk to me, abandoning her mom and Lucia. Although she spoke minimal Spanish, the mother finally communicated through gestures that she was interested in buying a *faja* but had not been able to find any for sale in the Plaza de Ponchos. Most Otavalan women purchase their *de anaco* clothing pieces from stores or a market that sells food and indigenous clothing to

locals. Not knowing there were any *fajas* for sale in the Plaza de Ponchos and wanting to please her customer who was insistent that she wanted Lucia's faja, Lucia took off her belt to show it to the woman. Thankfully, indigenous Otavalan women wear two belts: a plain one to hold their skirt in place, and one with a design and color scheme that matches their outfit. At this point, the daughter moaned, "Mom, not again! I'm not a part of this!" She looked at me and said, "She's done this before. It's so embarrassing," covering her face so she did not have to make eye contact with Lucia. This caused Lucia to laugh. While she did not understand the daughter's English words, as a mother, she certainly understood the body language and tone of voice. The woman was so excited, she bought the belt without haggling for the price. She then noticed me talking to her daughter and joined our conversation in English. When she realized I could also speak Spanish, she asked if I would find out where the belt was made. She explained to me that she had "been looking everywhere for a belt but couldn't find any." I translated for Lucia, who told me, "It was handmade in a little town near Lago San Pablo. She probably likes it because it's handmade, like I did. I paid more for it because it was handmade, so that's why I asked for more [a higher price]. Explain to her" [translated by author].

Afterward, I went with Lucia on a hunt to find another faja for her to wear for the rest of the day. She joked, "Hurry, I'm not [properly] dressed. I have so many [*fajas*] at home, but we have to find one here" [translated by author]. While she had purchased the handwoven, hand-embroidered belt for \$25, she bought a new machine woven and embroidered one for \$8 because she was in a hurry. Although she could not leave her stall unattended for long, she remarked, "It's fun to be the one shopping around the market for a change!" and joked with other vendors, "today, we're tourists" [translated by author].

While we walked, I expressed my shock to Lucia, saying that must be the first time she has ever sold something she was wearing at the time. Much to my surprise, Lucia said she had actually sold her belt and *cinta* [hair tie] before when customers insisted that they wanted the one she was wearing. She said she was reluctant to do so because she "thought it was odd that they wanted something off my body" [translated by author]. She had also sold her necklaces and bracelets before, and said it was common for Otavalan women to be asked to sell their distinctive jewelry. So many tourists asked

about purchasing her jewelry that she began carrying a stock of jewelry specifically to sell to tourists. This was a unique experience for me, to watch a vendor be asked to sell items she was wearing at the time, but Lucia's comments highlighted that female Otavalan vendors were frequently expected to sell goods and their identity, quite literally selling the items that marked their bodies as indigenous Otavalans.

Otavalan vendors were accustomed to vending their identity alongside their goods during short interactions with strangers they would likely never see again. As such, they were accustomed to tourists asking to take their photos, understanding that their appearance marks them as Other and was part of the shopping experience for tourists in the market. Many tourists even offered to pay women for their photo, although most women declined the offer. Thus, women strategically used their image as part of their vending strategies in the market. In addition, many Otavalan women's pictures are used specifically to promote tourism, and they are accustomed to their image being part of marketing strategies by tourism companies and by the state, as it promotes tourism to the region. Knowing this, it was still surprising to me to see an Otavalan woman I know in a photo used to advertise day trip tours from Quito, titled "Otavalo Market & Unique Cultural Experience" on Trip Advisor (Otavalo Market & Unique Cultural Experience). Because she clearly posed for the photo in front of the items she was selling and the photo was used on a popular website, I have chosen to include it without identifying her, despite it showing her face (See Figure 5.25).



Figure 5.25 An indigenous Otavalan woman posing with the goods she vends in the Plaza de Ponchos to advertise day trips from Quito on Trip Advisor. Photo source: https://www.tripadvisor.com/AttractionProductReview-g294308-d21077259-Otavalo_Market_Unique_Cultural_Experience-Quito_Pichincha_Province.html

Although Emilia grew up in Quito, during an ethnographic interview, she described how Otavalo has changed since she was born there and since she moved back after getting married:

My community has changed a lot. Before, it was more closed off [isolated]. Now, there is a different mentality for the kids that it should be more open. The world has changed, too. Things that happen in other places affect us here, too. For example, how they [indigenous Ecuadorians] dress has changed. When people travel, they change their clothes, cut their hair [to fit in]. they come back looking like that [retaining their new look even after returning home, which results in] – not as traditional of a look. [Translated by author].

Even though other vendors were indigenous, Emilia felt isolated from her indigenous identity growing up in Quito. Thus, dressing *de anaco* was important to Emilia because it allowed her to demonstrate her indigeneity and connect with members of her community.

Many vendors who were 35 years old and younger preferred to dress in Western clothing, unless their mothers made them dress *de anaco*. Some vendors dressed *de anaco* only in the market, and even then, sometimes only on bigger market days. Others dressed *de anaco* more consistently because they felt pressure to publicly perform their identity as indigenous women. Many female vendors recounted vivid memories of their

parents dressing them *de anaco* specifically to make sales in the market. All of this is detailed in specific instances below.

I was surprised to see Veronica dressed *de anaco* on a cool, cloudy Saturday because she had previously told me she found women's indigenous style of clothing cold and unflattering, and preferred American style clothing. (For context about Veronica's comment: The open-toe sandals/*alpargatas* leave one's feet exposed to the air and elements. The large skirts/*anacos* obscure one's body.) The hem of Veronica's skirt was embroidered, and she proudly told me she had done it herself by hand, and that she has four skirts she had hand-embroidered. Veronica's sister, Concepción – who dresses *de anaco* daily – teased that Veronica only dresses *de anaco* on the weekend, and Veronica agreed, saying again that she does not like to dress *de anaco*. Still, Veronica felt pressure to visibly perform her indigenous identity in the market, dressing *de anaco* at the expense of her personal preference and comfort.

Karla made a conscious choice to dress *de anaco* in the market to uphold tourists' expectations that indigenous women would publicly perform their Otherness. Karla told me, "I sell more when I'm dressed as indigenous [*como indígena*]. People want the full experience. They think it's more real when indigenous people wear indigenous clothes" [translated by author]. Many Otavalans used the phrase "*como indígena*" ("as indigenous"), rather than "*de anaco*," which demonstrates the importance of dress for their indigenous identity. For Karla, this 'choice' began at a young age, when her parents began dressing her *de anaco* for market days. She continued, "I didn't start dressing indigenous until I was 7 and my sister was 8. My dad's cousin said we should, so tourists would buy things from our mom. And it was true" [translated by author]. Now, she dressed *de anaco* nearly all of the time, even if she was not vending in the market. It had become part of how she publicly performed her identity, but it was a conscious decision because she was fully aware of the consequences of her appearance in regard to tourists' expectations and her ability to make a living.

Although most vendors were women, Karla described how tourists' expectations were different for female and male vendors in the Plaza de Ponchos:

In general, men sell the same amount as women, even though they don't wear indigenous clothing and women do. But the men who wear indigenous clothing

sell more than those who don't. Tourists love seeing the blue ponchos and white pants. They always take pictures, then they buy something. But men hardly ever dress like that now. Only for special occasions, not for everyday [vending]. Men don't like indigenous clothes because they say *alpargatas* hurt their feet, but we wear them just fine [pointing to her own feet, clad in *alpargatas*]. [Translated by author].

Thus, the main distinction that impacted sales was between women who dressed *de anaco* and those who did not, rather than between male and female vendors in their different styles of dress. This underscores the expectation that women will be living vessels of indigeneity by upholding traditions that men are no longer expected to observe. A male vendor in Western clothing could be as successful as a female vendor wearing *de anaco*, yet a female vendor wearing Western clothing would be less successful, according to Karla.

While my indigenous Otavalan friends and contacts did not always enjoy dressing *de anaco*, they did enjoy sharing elements of their traditional clothing with me, seeming to take pride in visually marking me as part of their group. Andrea gifted me a gold bead necklace in the style that indigenous Otavalan women wear. When I put on the necklace, Andrea's mother Elena proclaimed, "Now, you're a woman!" [translated by author]. I joked that I didn't know what I was before, and Elena responded, "all women here wear [the gold bead] necklaces at all times. Only young girls don't" [translated by author]. Thus, my wearing the necklace signaled I was an adult woman, in her eyes. Elena was more comfortable speaking Kichwa than Spanish and would often look to one of her daughters to translate longer conversations, but she was so excited by my willingness to wear the gifted necklace that she began discussing the jewelry with me in Spanish. Andrea and Elena debated over the tightness at which I should wear the necklace, with Elena redoing Andrea's work, while commenting that she wished the necklace had more strands. Elena joked, "A woman wears more necklaces [or a necklace with more strands] when she's ugly to distract from her face [because the necklace is beautiful]. You're pretty, so it's ok" [translated by author] that my necklace had fewer strands. While it is largely a reflection of personal preference, Elena's comment reflected the trend that many of the older women wore necklaces with more strands and many of the younger women wore necklaces with fewer strands. On a personal level, this interaction signaled a

moment of acceptance into a group to which I do not belong through the gift of material culture, as Andrea and Elena marked me as a member of their women-only indigenous family through the use of jewelry; from a research perspective, Elena's comment was poignant among the context of so many other indigenous women who spoke with me about the importance of their appearance in regard to how they were perceived as indigenous women, which has implications for them as vendors. For Elena, a respected elder in her late sixties at the time, a proper indigenous woman dressed *de anaco*, including the appropriate jewelry, to demand the respect afforded to her social position.

5.1.3.8 Building a Vending Community and Supplying the Market

An important component of the market was the sense of community vendors had with one another. This was often something that tourists noticed immediately, commenting on how special or how welcoming it made the market feel. The sense of community was also incredibly important for vendors who cited it as the most important component and the best benefit of their workplace. While visiting with Lucia at her stall, she initiated a conversation to express her gratitude for working in the Plaza with friends, family, and contacts. She said, "It can be boring working all day alone. Sometimes, I get sleepy [from boredom]. But it is better than going to Quito [traveling alone] because that is boring and lonely. At least here, you know your neighbors [neighboring vendors in the market] and you can talk" [translated by author]. In the market, she knew her neighbors and considered many of them friends, so she always had people to talk to. Telling stories and jokes, sharing food, and listening to music are all ways vendors pass time together while building a sense of community. Sharing food is so significant that Concepción took this picture during her turn with the camera in the modified photovoice methodology (See Figure 5.26). Her mom had prepared one of my favorite Ecuadorian dishes specially for me, and we had a wonderful afternoon talking, visiting, eating, and sharing with neighboring vendors in the market. Many vendors also produced items while in the market, citing the need to pass time. It was also because of this sense of community that vendors were able to borrow and loan items to one another, relying on reciprocity without

fear of theft or exploitation. It was sometimes even the sense of community that vendors missed most when they traveled to sell in other markets.



Figure 5.26 Eating together in the market. This helps to pass the time and maintain social relationships between vendors who share food and treat one another. Modified photovoice photo, taken by Concepción.

During a family history interview, Emilia explained: “Here, people are dedicated to *artesanías*, agriculture, and other things, but Quito is different. It’s a faster life in Quito, everyone keeps to themselves, they don’t interact. I knew my neighbors in the market better than my neighbors where I lived. They [the neighbors in the market] were also indigenous” [translated by author]. From my many conversations with Emilia, it became clear that her indigenous identity and relationships to other indigenous members of her community are important because she felt cut off from them while growing up in Quito. She took pride in demonstrating her indigenous identity through her *de anaco* dress and Kichwa language, as well as the relationships she had developed with indigenous vendors because of her role as a producer-vendor. Emilia split her time between managing machinated hand weaving production at her home in Otavalo, selling items in the market in Otavalo, and selling items in the market in Quito. These multiple

roles were taxing, and we often talked about how exhausting it was. Still, she always found her energy renewed when she thought about her relationships with others.

While many vendors relied on sales to tourists, producer-vendors made sales to tourists but largely relied on sales of larger quantities to other vendors. It was not uncommon for producer-vendors to have a smaller, more visible display of goods for tourists and a larger stock of goods at the back of their stall, intentionally reserved for other vendors to purchase. In fact, depending on the scale of production, a few producer-vendors may supply the majority of stalls in the market with a particular item!

Producer-vendors sold their goods to neighboring vendors, who could be viewed as competition from an economic standpoint. However, this relationship was beneficial for both parties because it allowed producer-vendors to make more sales (selling to vendors as well as tourists), while stocking the stalls of other vendors, which allowed them larger variety of items for potential sales. These transactions instilled a sense of community, and the relationships between vendors and producer-vendors was important for how the market operates. When producer-vendor Emilia was in the market, one of her neighboring vendors, Lucia, included a smaller number of items she had purchased from Emilia in her stall's display and supplemented her stall's display with other items. When Emilia was not in the market, Lucia would display more of the items she had purchased from Emilia. This was a courtesy that some vendors extended to the producer-vendors who supplied their stalls and exemplified the importance of the relationships between vendors.

As a producer-vendor, Emilia only went to the market on Wednesdays and Saturdays, when she often sold items to other vendors in the market. Like many other producer-vendors, she had fewer days in the market, which meant fewer days to make sales. However, by selling items to other vendors, producer-vendors were often guaranteed multiple sales during their market days, which could sustain them for the days they did not attend market. Whenever she was in the market, it was common to see other vendors come running over, asking if Emilia had a specific item (for example: a Real Madrid scarf). It seemed all the vendors knew that if you did not have something a customer wanted, you went to Emilia to get it. This ranged from a single item to a mass order. To keep track of all her sales to other vendors, Emilia kept a ledger, noting what

vendors bought from her, on what date, if they were placing an order for more things, and whether or not they had paid for some, all, or none of the products. Practically everyone bought from her because she had a production site, so she, her husband, and their employees made everything she sold. This included scarves for soccer teams, zip-up hooded sweaters, pullover sweaters, thin winter scarves, and team hats.

One day, a female vendor came to Emilia, wanting 36 Ecuadorian soccer scarves to resell. She had not made arrangements with Emilia previously but was hoping she would have them available. Emilia told the vendor to come to her house because that is also the production site and storage facility. When she said she could not, Emilia said she would bring them to the woman here in the Plaza. She sold her the 16 scarves she had with her, and then went immediately to her house to get the rest. Although this is only one example, it was by no means an isolated incident. In fact, this incident represents the trend for producer-vendors to bring large quantities of goods to the market specifically to sell to other vendors. Bringing these quantities of goods to the market comes at an expense, as workers are paid to help transport the items. Yet, as this example indicates, many vendors were unable to visit production workshops/warehouses (usually located at the producer-vendor's home), so it was worthwhile to bring the items to the market. Emilia explained, "Sometimes they [other vendors] come to my house, but usually, they buy them here" [indicating the market; translated by author]. Even if the vendor who originally indicated an interest in purchasing items fell through – which was not an irregular occurrence – the producer-vendor had opportunities to sell her goods to other vendors or tourists.

For most of the summer of 2018, Emilia had troubles with her machinated looms, which lowered her production. This impacted not only her own supply of items to sell to tourists, but also her supply to sell to vendors, and therefore, many vendors' supplies as well. Emilia sells items in both Quito and Otavalo, and her supply was running low in both locations. There were many disappointed vendors who left Emilia's stall in the Plaza de Ponchos without buying anything because she did not have what they wanted or needed. On one Saturday in June, it became so obvious that she needed more items, she left me and her nephew in charge of her stall, so she could go home to get more items. Even when she restocked, her supply was still much lower than normal.

In October, Emilia finally restocked her supply of sweaters. She told me that all of their machines were finally working again, after months of one or more of the machinated looms constantly being down. In the past, they had five machines, but they had sold one, so they had four machinated looms on site. Because the machines periodically shut down and need maintenance, Emilia estimated they really only have three functioning machinated looms at any given time: “getting parts [and servicing the looms] takes time and money, so they don’t all work” [translated by author]. After having production issues all summer that caused a decreased supply, they decided to again purchase a fifth machinated loom. With that, production was up and running, allowing her to finally restock her inventory, as well as the inventory of many other stalls in the market. It was somewhat unfortunate for Emilia that her inventory was finally restocked in October, when the largest consumer demand occurs during June, July, and the beginning part of August, coinciding with the major tourism season for visitors from the U.S. and Europe. Emilia told me that during September and October, sales are always down, even to other vendors. She said the start of classes is the main reason for lower sales: “everyone is back in school, so no one is traveling” [translated by author]. Not only were there fewer customers purchasing items in the market, but vendors restocked less frequently because they were not making as many sales and therefore did not need to replenish their inventory.

Because Emilia finally had more sweaters than she had had in months, several other vendors came over, looking for specific items. Unfortunately, some of these were still unavailable. Even though her inventory was restocked, and she finally had big piles of sweaters for sale again, she clearly still had more production work ahead in order to meet the vendors’ demand (See Figure 5.27). In her restocked supply, she had more pullover sweaters and very few of the zip-up hooded sweaters. Emilia explained that when producing items, they have to choose which kind of item they will make for a one-to-two-week period because it is not practical to switch the machinated looms more frequently. After seeing the demand from other vendors, she hoped they could switch styles, colors, and sizes soon to round out her stock and accommodate the requests.



Figure 5.27 A recently restocked stall of a producer-vendor. Usually, the producer-vendor places smaller stacks of items on display at the front of her stall for tourists and keeps larger piles at the back of her stall for vendors. Because her stock had been depleted for months, she knew many vendors would visit to make large purchases, so she opted to place more items on display. [Author photo]

5.1.3.9 Tearing down the Stall, Packing Up, and Heading Home

Just as vendors must set up their stalls every morning, they must also tear them down every evening. It was a time consuming and exhausting system that left one's body aching. Many vendors packed up at a more leisurely rate than they set up, in part because they held out hope for one more sale and in part because they were tired from a long day's work. Tearing down also lacks the excitement or incentive of setting up because there was no more potential to make money. Once vendors returned home for the day, more unpaid work awaited them. For these reasons, it usually took 3-4 hours for vendors to pack up their goods and tear down the temporary infrastructure of their stalls. Most vendors began packing items around 4 P.M. and tried to strategically pack first what they did not think will sell for the remainder of the day. Vendors with less space and fewer items typically left the market between 5-6 P.M, while those with more space and more items left the market between 7-8 P.M.

Because packing up was so time consuming, it became a sport of sorts with invisible badges of honor for those who could pack the fastest (skill) as well as those who remained in the market the latest (dedication). Many vendors counted down until they began packing up with both anticipation and dread: anticipation because it signaled the beginning of the end of the workday and dread because it was so time consuming and exhausting, and more work awaited them at home.

On Saturdays, vendors who set up in the streets must pack up earlier than those located in the Plaza de Ponchos so that trucks can get through the streets to carry away Plaza vendors' items. Opinions about street locations were mixed: some vendors saw them as desirable because local and tourist foot traffic was guaranteed, while others saw them as less desirable because these vendors must arrive later and leave earlier. Still, having a location in the street was better than not having a space to sell at all on the busiest market day. Vendors who did not "own" a space in the Plaza de Ponchos at least had a chance on Saturdays to rent a space in the streets or set up on a corner and hope they were not forced to move – a common strategy for mestizo vendors who came from other towns/countries and for Venezuelan refugees. Thus, street vendors were at the same mercy as those in the Plaza proper; so much of their livelihood depended on the daily whims of tourists.

There were several factors that influenced when vendors would set up and tear down, and even what days they would vend in the market. One incredibly important factor was one's religion and the associated festivities. From my earlier work in Ecuador, I learned that Evangelical Protestantism is increasing among Otavaleños, which often impacts the economic engagement and involvement in community activities among religious converts, including decisions about when to vend and when to head home, as well as participation in local celebrations, like Inti Raymi/San Juan.

During the two-week period in June when Inti Raymi/San Juan festivities occurred at night, it was common for vendors to stay home from the market to prepare for and recover from the festivities, which were held in different locations each night. On the weekend during which nighttime Inti Raymi/San Juan festivities would be held in the Plaza de Ponchos, all vendors were expected to pack up early, which impacted their Saturday sales. Loudspeakers in the Plaza played announcements repeatedly to remind

vendors to leave the market early, and municipal workers circulated with the same message (Saturday 6/23/18). Unlike the usual system, vendors located in the Plaza were encouraged to pack up before those on the streets to make sure city workers had time to convert the Plaza area for the nighttime festivities. We started packing up around 3:30, which was very early for a Saturday. Despite the announcements, Inti Raymi/San Juan celebrations attract very few tourists, who generally did not understand why the market was closing early.

Some Otavaleños opted not to celebrate Inti Raymi/San Juan. Andrea is an indigenous Otavalan woman who lives in Peguche with her mother and sister, where they produce handmade textiles. Unlike the majority of Otavalans who are Roman Catholic, Andrea and her family have converted to Evangelical Protestantism. She and her family were prime candidates for religious conversion for several reasons. First, they were already socially ostracized because her father left when she was quite young and took the only son of the nuclear family to live with him. He cut all ties with his first family of procreation, remarried, and started another family. As a result of her father's absence, there was no male in the household, which put them in an economically and socially precarious position. It is largely due to the absence of a male in the household that all three remaining women became so heavily involved in all steps of textile production, including weaving on floor looms – a task usually considered men's labor. Her mother has explained that their role as primary textile producers was, in large part, the result of economic necessity. She already possessed the skills to make textiles and had no other marketable skills, so what else was she to do with two young daughters depending on her? The family also lacked financial resources. In large part, they were drawn to Evangelical Protestantism because it provided a reason to not participate in the numerous religious festivals and festivities throughout the year that are quite costly and involve a great deal of imbibing alcohol.

Andrea was very committed to her church, where she attended services and choir rehearsals several times per week. She also helped with different events, including what in the U.S. is known as a Vacation Bible School for children. Because Andrea is a producer-vendor, her religious activities limited the amount of time she dedicated to textile production at home or to vending in the Plaza de Ponchos. Because of her role as

both producer and vendor, it was quite common for Andrea to only attend market one day per week (either Wednesday or Saturday) because of her responsibilities to produce items and as an active church member. Some days, she was unable to attend the market because she needed to produce items for a large order. On market days, Andrea's time vending was also limited because she left early (around 3:00 or 3:30 PM on Wednesdays) to attend church services. By comparison, most of the vendors stayed in the market until 7:00 or 8:00 P.M., allowing them several more hours in which to make sales. For Andrea and her family, their religious activities were valuable for their spiritual well-being, but their religious practices likely impacted their economic earning, as their time was divided between producing, vending, and religious activities on a more frequent basis than many Catholic Otavaleños.

5.1.3.10 Resting at Home

After spending 12-14 hours working in the market, completing the physically strenuous tasks of setting up and tearing down a stall, and the social labor of interacting with neighbors and customers all day, exhausted vendors look forward to heading home. Yet, on workdays, more work awaits them at home. They must make dinner and complete household chores, cleaning, doing laundry, ensuring children are ready for the next day of school. Heading home meant vendors could put on cozy slippers and relish the privacy of their home, but they generally worked for a few more hours before heading to bed. Because Otavalo is on the equator, the sun sets around 6 PM every day. Thus, vendors often awoke before dawn and went to bed long after the sun had set.

Because Saturday was the big market day, vendors almost always worked on Saturdays, so they chose another day or two of the week as their days off from work. Sunday and Monday were the most common days for vendors to rest, run errands, or work around their homes. Karla explained, "I take Sundays off. I need a break. I stay home, and get caught up on things around the house, when I feel like it. But it's also my day to be lazy. We [Karla and her husband] spend the whole day resting at home! Most times, I feel like I can barely move, my body hurts so much on Sundays [from working all week]" [translated by author]. The vendors I know rarely complained about their work, but most vendors mentioned being 'sore' at the end of the work week, indirectly

referencing how physically strenuous it was to set up and tear down a market stall every day. Comparing her approach to other vendors in the market, Karla said:

My mom has as many *maletas* as Manuela [Karla's neighbor in the market, a single woman in her thirties], but my mom only puts out enough, so she doesn't get too tired. And my dad or my siblings usually help her set up and tear down. But Manuela does it all alone. She has no kids, no husband to help. So, she does it all alone. And she works every day! Can you believe it?! I get tired just watching her work so hard. I look at her, setting up late, tearing down late, and I'm ready to take a nap. It works for her, but for me? No. I put out what I need, so it looks nice. And I need a day to rest! [Translated by author].

For Karla and many other vendors, their time at home was restorative. With such a physically taxing job, working in an outdoor market exposed to the elements, interacting with vendors and customers, vendors relished their time to rest at home.

5.1.3.11 Vending After Hours in The Night Market

In addition to the long-standing daytime market in the Plaza de Ponchos, a less popular night market in the Plaza de Ponchos was added around 2015-2016. Vendors must pay an additional fee to sell items in the night market. This market only used a few rows on one side of the market. The *redondos* were not utilized for the nighttime market (although some vendors were still packing up when the night market begins, but nothing was actively for sale there). Unlike the daytime market, night vendors did not use any infrastructure for their stalls, but instead laid their goods on tarps on the ground. This is reminiscent of the origins of the market, when indigenous vendors would display their small selection of goods on blankets spread on the ground, prior to the installation of the concrete *redondos* in the 1970s. As Isabel explained during an interview, "Before, they [indigenous vendors] sold handicrafts on a blanket on the ground," instead of at concrete kiosks or tables in the now-paved Plaza de Ponchos [translated by author]. Describing the changes to the Plaza and surrounding area, she continued: "Now, things are well-made and modern. There are streetlights, bridges – all things we didn't have before" [translated by author].

There were not many vendors in the night market, and each vendor only had a small selection of items for sale, usually apparel items for cool weather, which often

included items like shoes or fleece jackets that were not produced by indigenous Otavalans. During the summer, the night market was small and only utilizes a small section of the Plaza de Ponchos, but in December, it was larger and filled more of the Plaza for locals to do their Christmas shopping. In addition to the indigenous vendors selling goods, there was also a row of mestizo vendors with white plastic tents selling meals/food on the street side of the market.

In addition to selling in the daytime market in the Plaza de Ponchos, Jazmin also worked in the evening market from 7-11pm. In 2017, Jazmin sold most nights in the night market, but by 2018, she limited her time in the night market to 1-2 nights per week. She told me she needed time off from working so much because she was exhausted. She also found the nights to be exceptionally cold and would rather be at home with her family. She strategically set up in the night market during events when she anticipated a larger crowd (ex: Inti Raymi/San Juan and Yamor) to make it worthwhile. Unfortunately, this meant that she and her family members could not actively participate in festivities or could only participate in a limited capacity.

Despite her expansive stalls for the daytime market, Jazmin only sold a small selection of items in the night market, including hats, gloves, and scarves. These catered to people who had been out all day were caught off-guard by the cool evenings, so they would make impulse purchases for comfort. Other vendors sold knock-off shoes, hats, pants, and fleece jackets. Because most vendors only offered a small selection of the goods they display during the daytime, this also complicated logistics in terms of packing up and storing their items.

In addition to her own items, Jazmin would sometimes feature items from her sister's stall, especially if her own inventory was running low. Jazmin and her niece Concepción both crocheted Aya Huma masks, although Concepción often created a more polished product. During the Inti Raymi/San Juan festivities in 2018, Jazmin's supply of Aya Huma masks was running low. Since the masks are heavily featured during Inti Raymi/San Juan, they are a popular item. On one Saturday, Jazmin sold five of Concepción's Aya Huma masks, and both women spent the following week crocheting more masks. Concepción did not participate in the night market because she did not think it is worth her time, money, and effort to return to the Plaza de Ponchos to sell items at

night. She said that she would spend more money getting to the Plaza from Peguche and back home, on food and on rent for market space, only to “freeze and make nothing” [translated by author]. After working hard all day long, she would much rather spend the time at home. She had briefly sold items at night in the past, but lost money, so she did not participate in the night market anymore.

5.2 Crafting Identity

5.2.1 Producers or Artisans?

Craft production is often viewed as compatible with indigeneity in that both are considered to be ‘traditional’ – characterized by links to the past – not heavily mechanized, and not resulting in the accumulation of wealth. It is not that indigenous populations make crafts because they are incapable of other employment, but they often find this is the path to economic engagement with the fewest obstacles. “Few individuals create an art form in order to be a peasant,” but many find their options are limited (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009:41). Indigenous groups may identify as entrepreneurs, artisans, or both. For instance, the Zapotec in Teotitlán have been noted in the past to have been divided into distinct groups of weavers and merchants (Wood 2008; Stephen 2005). Otavalans, however, claim both identities of weavers/producers and merchants simultaneously, and take great pride in being artisans known for their craftsmanship, while also being able to sell in markets around the world without the involvement of middlemen (Meisch 2002:3; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). Yet, these identifications are somewhat paradoxical in that labor is gendered. In theory, only men may weave, while women are typically responsible for selling textiles; yet, the entire community claims an identity from which labor half of the population is omitted based on their gender (Meisch 2002). In practice, however, it seems that individuals frequently transgress these prescribed gender divisions of labor. While production is mainly associated with weaving and men, as noted in this chapter, women are frequently responsible for other types of craft production: knitting, crocheting, embroidery, jewelry-making, etc. In *Crafting Selves*, Dorinne Kondo described the relationship between gender, power, and work identities in Japan, writing that craft “Solidary communities are based on exclusion of the unskilled – and unskilled, too often, means women” (Kondo 1990:230). Further,

“Celebrations of artisanal community mask the cultural and historical construction of skill: how it is that jobs are labeled skilled or unskilled in the first place, and what resonances skill might have within a particular cultural context” (Kondo 1990:230). Thus, it has previously been noted that elsewhere, women have been excluded from craft communities and excluded from the identities associated with those crafting communities. Furthermore, class differences still exist in Otavalo, as families with strong actual and fictive kinship networks are more successful at engaging with the global market and accumulating profits (Collaredo-Mansfeld 1999). Thus, indigenous Otavalan women are multiply marginalized as they navigate crafting identity.

Several indigenous Otavalans with whom I interacted spoke with me about connections with other indigenous peoples in Ecuador and throughout the Americas. For example, while sitting at Karla’s stall in the market one Saturday, her husband Alejandro and I had a conversation about indigenous groups in Ecuador. Knowing I was interested in indigenous Otavalan culture, which some Otavaleños described to me as “*indígena* Kichwa Otavaleños,” Alejandro said, “Do you know there are twenty-nine Kichwa people groups in Ecuador? Look. Not just here, [but] all over Ecuador” [translated by author]. He showed me a map on his phone (See Figure 5.28) and continued to explain, “we’re not all the same people [group], but we are all indigenous Kichwa. Each [group] has different ways of dressing and believing, but each [group] is known as Kichwa” [translated by author]. Alejandro used “Kichwa” to indicate indigenous ethnicity and explained that these are different groups that are all known as “Kichwa.” While these different groups speak Kichwa or dialects of Kichwa, it is more common for the groups to be known by their indigenous or ethnic descriptive name (ex: Otavalo or Karanki/Caranqui), which can be seen in the map below. The map uses the label “pueblos de la nacionalidad kichwa en la Sierra Ecuatoriana,” which translates to “peoples of Kichwa nationality in the Ecuadorian highlands” [translated by author].

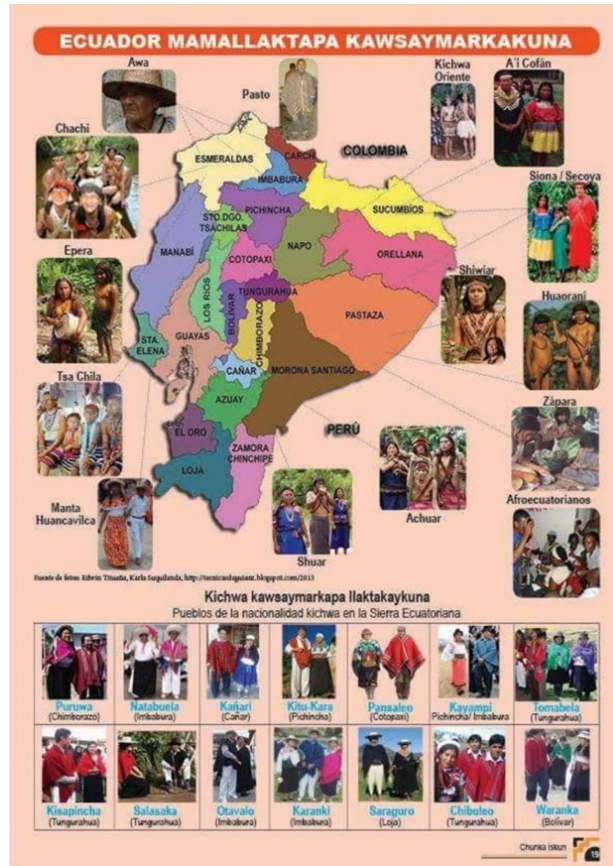


Figure 5.28 A map of Kichwa speaking indigenous ethnic groups in Ecuador, listing the indigenous group’s name and location by province. Photo provided by Alejandro via WhatsApp 7/7/18. Original source of map is unknown.

Alejandro described the pride indigenous groups feel in their identity, but he was critical of the ramifications of publicly demonstrating one’s indigeneity:

On parties – for weddings, baptisms, things like that – people spend more than they have. They go into debt for parties! Because it is expected [to host elaborate celebrations]. Then, they live their lives in poverty. All because of pride. Imagine, thousands of dollars on a wedding! All to keep up with their neighbors and show everyone they aren’t poor *indios*. But they are [poor]! They spend so much because of their pride! No, that has to change. There must be a better way [to publicly demonstrate pride in one’s indigenous identity without negative economic repercussions]. [Translated by author].

One phrase of note was “*indios pobres*,” or “poor Indians,” which is aligned with derogatory stereotypes white and mestizo Ecuadorians had and often continue to have of indigenous peoples as ‘poor, dirty Indians,’ which is distinguished from the more positive

connotations of pride in one's identity associated with the term "*indigenas*" or "indigenous peoples." In my translations, I am influenced by Canessa's work, where he explains the power relationship surrounding terms used to describe indigenous peoples, writing, "It is for this very reason that I use the word *indian*: it jars; it does – or should – make one think; and more than any other term, it refers to a long history of colonial oppression" (Canessa 2012:7). With that in mind, I have translated "*indios*" to "Indian," as both are often pejorative terms, and "*indígena*" to "indigenous," as these are mainly the currently preferred term among these populations. Thus, for Alejandro, the link between different Kichwa speaking indigenous groups in Ecuador was their pride in their identity and the ways in which they felt they must publicly perform their indigeneity, even when it came at a cost (for example, hosting elaborate celebrations). Although he did not draw this connection, it seems to me that indigenous Otavalan women experience this tension not only for significant festivities, but on a daily basis when vending in the market, as they feel pressure to publicly perform their indigenous identity by dressing *de anaco* in the marketplace.

While Alejandro described specific indigenous groups in Ecuador, it was more common for Otavalans to make references to "*indios o indigenas*" ["Indians or indigenous peoples"] in general [translated by author]. Visitors to the Plaza de Ponchos may be surprised to find dreamcatchers and textiles with Navajo designs. When asking vendors about these items, the answer was always "we're all Indian/indigenous people" [both were used], and usually, a reference was made to the ability to produce these items and sell them for a cheaper price in Ecuador, responding to consumer demand. While at Peguche Wasi, a workshop/museum/store, the owner implied that dreamcatchers represent a Pan-American Indigenous movement. He said, "people shouldn't be upset to see them made here because we are indigenous people and so are they" [translated by author]. Otavaleños I spoke with had different ideas about what makes an item Otavalan or indigenous. For this man, intellectual property was shared more broadly among indigenous peoples across the Americas, rather than belonging to a specific group. While he did not state this, his perspective may be influenced by many international tourists' expectations of similarity among indigenous groups and among Latinos across the hemisphere. Certainly not all tourists expect homogeneity, but many are uneducated

about the diversity of indigenous groups, their languages, beliefs, and practices, as well as the diversity among Latin American populations, which shapes consumer expectations and interactions with Otavalans. He continued, “I don’t know how it started, but now... People always ask about them, so we make them. We can make and sell them for cheaper than in the U.S., so we make tourists happy” [translated by author]. He did not know how dreamcatchers first came to be made in Ecuador, but their production continues because it fulfills consumer desire for cheaper products. Thus, crafts and poverty are still linked with indigeneity for many people, including some Otavalans, like Alejandro and the owner of Peguche Wasi.

Diverse traditional cultural expectations have been documented across indigenous communities in Latin America about the ways in which crafts are distributed and sold by men and women in markets. In the highlands of Guatemala, one scholar noted that Mayan women sell items from their homes and in the local market, while men sell textiles abroad (Little 2004:97). Because Mayan women wear traditional clothing or *traje*, they were easily recognized as indigenous by tourists visiting Guatemala (Little 2004:92). This, along with their experience in dealing with tourists, allows them to tailor their interactions to fulfill tourists’ notions of exotic natives and be successful vendors in terms of making sales (Little 2004:97). When Karin Tice studied the Kuna people of Panama, she found that “wearing *molas* [Kuna *traje*] has come to symbolize Kuna ethnic pride tied to a ‘traditional’ way of life” (Tice 1995:62). Women are more likely to be the vendors in Otavalo, as well, because their traditional *de anaco* clothing marks them as indigenous to tourists and because they utilize a market narrative that capitalizes on tourists’ notions of indigeneity (Meisch 2002:100). Otavalan women are always navigating intersectional identities that include engagement with the local and the global through the marketplace.

5.2.2 Global Consumption: Tourism and Consumers’ Expectations

Although consumption of handicrafts is not the focus of this research project, consumers and their motivations in purchasing crafts are important in market studies. Tourism plays an increasing role in craft economies worldwide (Little 2004; Nash 1993; Zorn 2004; Wood 2008; Meisch 2002). As Dr. Morag Kersel discussed, tourists want to own part of the ethnic group they are visiting; they want to return home with a memento that carries a story of cultural interaction (2013; Tice 1995). The items tourists choose to

purchase or not purchase are often related to the stories they can tell family and friends about those items. Since Otavalan producers and vendors are involved in global consumption, they are attuned to consumer expectations and desires. The following ethnographic vignettes describe a few of the many tourist interactions I witnessed in the Plaza de Ponchos.

In August 2017, I was visiting with Concepción, when a mother and daughter came to the stall. They bought a table runner and began a conversation with me. The daughter described her mom as “half Ecuadorian,” and said they had come to Ecuador to visit her mother’s brother in Cotacachi. They had traveled around Quito and Cotacachi, and were in Otavalo only for the afternoon, coming specifically to visit the market. The daughter lamented buying items in other locations, saying the items in the Plaza de Ponchos were much prettier and the prices were better; her mom agreed, saying she wished they had more time in Otavalo, instead of passing through the town. Later that day, a family of four from New Jersey came to Concepción’s stall. The father was originally from Egypt and spoke both English and Spanish with an accent, struggling a bit to communicate. While his wife was shopping elsewhere in the market, the father called over his two teenage children to help him pick out a poncho, saying, “Don’t get your mom. She’ll tell me it’s stupid and I don’t need it.” His daughter did try to talk him out of it, asking, “Dad! When are you ever going to wear a poncho?! You’re never going to wear that at home!” But he was determined, explaining, “But it’s the Plaza de Ponchos. Of course I’m going to buy a poncho! I have to have one!” Concepción offered a starting price of \$25, and he was determined to get it down to \$20. He did not speak much Spanish but made an effort to communicate directly with Concepción. Throughout the entire encounter, he spoke to me quite a bit in English. Since his family was not supportive of the transaction, he turned to me for a second opinion. He asked about the material and wanted input on which color looked best. Concepción agreed to lower the price to \$21, but he remained determined to pay \$20. While continuing to haggle, he confided in me in English: “I’d be willing to pay her the extra dollar. I’ll still pay it. It’s just one more dollar. But it’s a point of pride. I want to be able to say, ‘I haggled well and made a good purchase.’” When Concepción finally agreed to \$20, he gave her a \$1 “tip for being so nice and so patient” with him. Hence, he left the market with a memento

representative of a cultural interaction, and the experience reinforced his ideas about the market.

One Saturday in July 2018, two mestiza women came to Andrea's stall, asking for a single-color poncho. Most ponchos are a combination of 2-3 colors, with one color as the predominant color and the other(s) as narrow vertical stripes down the front and back. They wanted a dark grey or black pure wool poncho and asked many questions about materials and production methods. They spoke quickly in Spanish and were clearly well-educated consumers, although it was a busy, noisy market day, so I could not hear the entirety of the conversation. These women were not typical customers not only because of their language level, but also because they were so well-educated about the materials and production techniques. They also knew to come to Andrea, as a member of the only local family who still hand weaves wool ponchos on floor looms. Andrea later said she did not know them, so it is likely the women asked around the market. Andrea did not have exactly what the women wanted, but she promised to make one quickly. They agreed on a price and delivery date before the women left. While Andrea – like many other producers – was happy to make a custom piece, I wonder if the women knew the amount of work this would entail. For Andrea's family, it is not economical to undergo the time consuming and labor-intensive tasks of preparing a loom to weave a single poncho. Therefore, her family would set up the loom to weave several ponchos with the same design – in this case, a plain dark grey. This look is atypical for ponchos in Otavalo, so while Andrea was guaranteed a sale, she would be taking a risk that the other ponchos would sell. She did not seem concerned, nor did she charge the customers a higher price for the custom piece, but this is a decision every producer must navigate. Although the women seemed to be more highly educated consumers than typical visitors to the market, most tourists are not well-versed in the production techniques and materials that are used to produce the crafts they purchase.

One Tuesday in June 2018 was a slow market day, which was not atypical for a Tuesday. I sat with Lucia, and although there were very few tourists in the market, we found ourselves entertained. Nearby, a man was making small sculptures out of a fine, flexible metal in both copper and silver colors (See Figure 5.29). Lucia overheard him talking with other men before I arrived at her stall, and she told me the man lives in

Iluman (a small community near Peguche) but has been in Columbia for the past year and has recently come back to the area. She was absolutely fascinated with the work he was doing. At one point, she convinced me that we should leave her stall – something she rarely did, even when visiting with her neighboring vendors – to get a better view of what he was doing. Although I had hoped to visit with Lucia, she was not talkative, instead focusing all afternoon on listening to the man speak. He talked with men all afternoon, and Lucia listened to gather more information about his work and life, but she never asked him any questions herself. I teased Lucia that she should ask the man for lessons since she was so fascinated by the process, but she replied, “My health keeps me from making crafts any more” [translated by author]. Lucia had previously made similar comments, which always surprised me, given the physical nature of her livelihood as a vendor in an outdoor market. Based on his speech and town of residence, both Lucia and I guessed the man was likely indigenous but dressed in western clothing with loose shoulder length hair, but neither of us felt comfortable confirming his identity.



Figure 5.29 A man making small figurines out of metal wire in the Plaza de Ponchos, drawing the attention of Otavalan vendors. [Author photo]

It was like he held court all afternoon. His craft was unlike typical Otavalan fiber crafts and more similar to the crafts that mestizos – especially those from outside of Ecuador – demonstrate on the streets surrounding the Plaza de Ponchos on Saturdays,

which most vendors are unable to view, as they tend to their stalls and to customers. It is likely for this reason – paired with the slow market day – that so many Otavalan vendors were drawn to watch him work. Although I never saw anyone purchase an item from the man, his public craft performance flipped the script and turned Otavalan vendors into tourists for the day; they stood and watched him produce crafts in the market, fascinated by his performance of craft production, just like foreign tourists who watch Otavalan vendors produce handmade portable crafts in the market. The man joked that he should charge people for watching him make his crafts because he always had a small audience of other vendors throughout the entire day. Although he was happy to demonstrate his work and speak with local men, he did not converse with any of the female vendors, and I struggled to engage him in direct conversation. Thus, Lucia and I learned only what we could observe and overhear from his conversations with men.

During the course of the day the man moved from a small section of the *redondo* that is largely unusable due to a dead tree stump to a space on the ground, displaying his crafts on top of a small tablecloth. When the municipal worker came around to collect the daily fees for using the space in the market, I became curious about what the man would do. Although he did not own or rent space in the market, he paid the daily fee without issue. I asked Lucia and was surprised when she explained that all spaces in the market cost the same price for the daily fee, whether they be in the concrete sections, tables, or the ground. This was the only time we saw the man in the market, so I never had an opportunity to question him about his craft.

Because of their experiences as vendors in markets around the world, Otavalans are attuned to consumer desires. Consumers can be grouped into two large categories: 1.) a small segment of more affluent and more educated consumers desire artisan crafts made with traditional materials and production techniques and is willing to pay higher prices for these goods and 2.) the majority of tourists who have less disposable income and are less educated in different cultures and crafts, who want to purchase multiple items to share with friends and family back home, and will not pay the higher prices necessary for these items. I will call the first category of consumers “artisan shoppers” and the second category “tourism shoppers” for reference.

Artisan shoppers are those who may shop Fair Trade in their home countries and are willing to spend more on goods because they feel they can make a social impact by how they spend their money, knowing that part of the profits from the sale go directly to the artisans/producers. Artisan shoppers are less likely to visit the Plaza de Ponchos and more likely to visit one of the galleries, coops, or artisan shops in Otavalo. Artisan shoppers are more likely to speak Spanish and may establish relationship with the vendors at the aforementioned locations. They are also the target audience for those who run workshop/museum/stores, although it is unknown how successful these locations are at targeting specific consumers.

Tourism shoppers are the most frequent visitors to the Plaza de Ponchos, and part of their motivation for visiting is the tourist market experience. As such, they seek to buy many items (often multiples of the same item) they can take home and distribute among friends, family, contacts, and their own home to serve as conversation starters about their travels. Thus, the items tourism shoppers purchase are often less significant than the stories they can tell because of those items. Tourism shoppers are less likely to speak Spanish, so they tend to focus on the size and price of an item, rather than the story describing the item or the vendor's relationship to it.

Some tourism shoppers enjoy visiting tourist markets around the world and appreciate the familiarity of their experiences. Many of these markets are outdoor, open-air markets, where crafts and food can be purchased. Many tourist markets have multiple stalls with similar small, budget-friendly items catered to tourists, so customers are expected to haggle for the best prices. This can be difficult as tourism shoppers often experience language barriers but attempting to navigate a foreign market and haggle for deals all adds to the stories one can tell about her souvenirs when she returns home. One tourist I encountered in the market told me (in English),

It's my first time in Ecuador, but I love to travel. It's great to see the market here because it's just like other markets we've been in. We've visited markets all over the world, and they all kinda feel the same...They have the same feeling. For example, China. We were in a market in China just like this. Everyone knew each other, just like this. It's great.

When I agreed that many of the vendors in the market are friends, neighbors, and often even relatives, he grew more excited, saying, “See, that’s fantastic! I love it!”

Different types of consumers have an impact on the goods that are produced, the production methods, the prices, and the vending strategies. Because most visitors to the Plaza de Ponchos are tourism shoppers, producers must produce many items to match consumer demand. To increase production, most producers have opted for mechanization. Tourism shoppers prefer small, cheap items so they can purchase many as gifts and fit them all in their luggage with international airline weight and size restrictions. One result of this consumer demand for small, cheap items is that the large handwoven tapestries and large handwoven ponchos produced on floor looms that were representative of the Plaza de Ponchos in earlier decades are now rare in the market. These handwoven textiles are large and heavy, making them difficult for tourism shoppers to transport. They are also more expensive because of the production technique and materials, and most tourism shoppers are unwilling or unable to pay fair prices for these textiles. Because not all items can be produced locally for a low enough price to merit a viable profit margin, many vendors feel pressured to sell cheap, mass-produced imported goods at their stalls. As discussed elsewhere, many vendors do not want to carry these items at their stalls, but they feel they have no other choice if they hope to make sales, as is essential for their livelihood.

Otavalans have long used the vending strategy of describing their personal relationship to the production of an item, describing whether they made the item themselves, their family member made the item, or the item was produced locally in Otavalo or Peguche. Many vendors still use this technique for items that ‘look Otavalan,’ like blankets, scarves, sweaters, etc., since Otavalans have been famous for their textiles for centuries. Items that do not ‘look Otavalan’ present vendors with challenges for the best vending strategy. Most vendors will mention the low price (it is common to price these items at \$1) and offer a better price if the customer buys the item in bulk (ex: 12 for \$10). Thus, they highlight the price, which they know is a selling point, while refraining from mentioning their relationship to the production of the item. As more imported goods are included in the market, it remains to be seen if vendors will shift vending strategies or

continue to rely on this combination of personal connection and low price, depending on the type of item they are promoting.

Because previous original research and literature reviews had indicated the historical significance of textiles for many indigenous Andean populations, especially Otavaleños, I asked, “Do you feel textiles are important for indigenous Otavalans?” in semi-structured ethnographic interviews [translated by author as: ¿Siente que los tejidos son importantes para los indígenas Otavaleños?] (See Appendix for Interview Guide). In a joint interview with Concepción and her mother Ana, Concepción replied, “Yes, because they shape tour guides and tourists’ opinions [of us and of the market]” [translated by author]. In a separate interview, Concepción’s aunt Ana Lucia answered the same question saying, “Yes, textiles/crafts are what bring tourists to Otavalo and especially here [to the market]. It is known around the country and internationally, too, that they are made here” [translated by author]. Thus, for both women, textiles were significant for Otavalans because of their draw and recognizability for tourists. This is significant, as both women are vendors in a tourist market. The next interview question in the sequence was: Do textiles teach any lessons? [translated by author as: ¿Los tejidos enseñan alguna lección?] (See Appendix for Interview Guide). Concepción said, “If tourists don’t like them, then producers change what they make. The lessons are about what sells” [translated by author]. For Concepción, crafts teach an important economic lesson about market-driven consumption. Thus, vendors were aware of consumers’ perceptions and expectations of their crafts as a major motivator for visiting Otavalo and purchasing items in the market. Vendors recognized the importance of responding to these expectations and the impact of tourism on their livelihoods as vendors in a globally known tourism market.

5.3 Challenges to Otavalan Vending

Otavalan vendors faced many challenges vending in tourist markets, both in Otavalo and abroad. Some of these challenges stemmed from interactions with customers, vendors, and tour guides, while other issues arose from the nature of outdoor, open-air tourist markets. The unstable nature of their livelihood was further compounded by the importance of crafts in indigenous Otavalan identity.

Economic transactions in Ecuador, especially in the Plaza de Ponchos, largely occurred using cash. Because prices were low, small bills were preferred, and paying with large bills may cause issues for a vendor. This is an unfamiliar concept for many tourists from the U.S., who are accustomed to paying for transactions with credit cards or electronic apps, which is further exacerbated by tourists who get cash from banks and ATMs without specifying the need for small bills. Thus, it was a common occurrence for vendors to ask friends and neighbors for change for larger bills, so they could give a customer their change from a transaction. This sometimes made tourists uncomfortable because they did not understand why a vendor had accepted their money and then walked away, not realizing the vendor was asking nearby for change. Because many tourists visiting Otavalo had limited Spanish skills, this presented a challenge for vendors who needed to reassure customers despite language barriers. One vending strategy to address this was to encourage customers to purchase more items, so the vendor would not need to give the customer as much change. On occasion, customers expressed to me that they realized too late that their large bills would cause issues, so they intentionally purchased multiple items from the same vendor, which had not been their original intent. Observations have indicated that other customers were unaware of the issues caused by their large bills. Their frustrations were summarized by one tourist who complained to me, “everyone’s always trying to sell me things here, all the time, on every corner. Even when I’m buying something already, they want me to buy more. It’s overwhelming!”

This issue was exemplified one day when Jazmin came running to her sister Ana Lucia’s nearby stall, where I was sitting. Jazmin appeared nervous and in a hurry. She thrust a \$100 bill at us, and asked “Is it real?!” [translated by author]. After a quick inspection, Ana Lucia confidently stated that it was real, and I agreed, so Jazmin ran back to her stall. Ana Lucia and I were confused by the encounter, but we continued talking. Jazmin later returned to Ana Lucia’s stall to explain the situation to us. A customer had wanted to buy a \$10 item, but only had a \$100 bill. Jazmin did not have enough change and knew that even if she asked her neighbors, it would be difficult to produce so much change and be able to pay her neighbors back in a timely manner. Using her skills as a vendor, she explained, “I kept showing him things. Like this [she demonstrates, grabbing items from the stall and presenting them to her sister and me] Sir, a blanket? Yes, you

need one for your bed! It's comfortable, yes? You like this. How about a shawl? It's a good gift for your wife. And a sweater. Look, it's soft and warm. I have other colors" [translated by author]. She continued to present him with items, describing why he should buy them, and she was proud that she successfully talked him into adding other items to his purchase: "I just showed him more things. And when he didn't say no, I'd add it to his pile. It was three or four more items [I talked him into] – or maybe it was more. I don't know. I'm still in shock!" [translated by author]. She had wanted to verify that the bill was real before completing the transaction by giving him change. Jazmin exclaimed, "What a relief that I wasn't tricked [by a fake bill]! I've never seen one [a \$100 bill] in person before, so I didn't know if it was real! Only rich people have those. I feel like a movie star [a wealthy person]. I can't believe that happened!" referring both to the large currency and to her success as a vendor in convincing a customer to purchase more items [translated by author].

Issues around money also occurred when customers had different valuations of goods than producer-vendors and vendors. Jazmin's husband, Arturo Esteban, explained that he only liked to accompany his wife in the market on Saturdays because they were a different type of customer than those who come during the week. He said, "Wednesday customers are the worst! I wish they didn't even come! They expect impossibly low prices. They all want the lowest deals. But there's no profit for us. They think we should just give this [gesturing to the items at their stall] away. They don't understand! It's not free! It costs us, too. We have to make a living" [translated by author]. Arturo Esteban's comment references that he and his immediate family purchased nearly every item they sold at their stall. Jazmin crocheted Aya Huma masks, which was the only form of craft production they were involved in.

In Otavalo, the price of an item was based on the amount of time and material that went into the production of that item. Customers often expected time to be a factor, so they understood that hand-embroidered items cost more than machine embroidered items (if they were aware of the difference in production techniques). However, customers who were not from Latin America were generally unaware that the amount of material was also a factor in the item's price, so they were often surprised to find that an adult extra-large cost more than an adult small, which cost more than a child's small. At Jazmin and

Arturo Esteban's stall, they carried embroidered linen shirts. These shirts came in long and short sleeve options for men, women, and children. Adult embroidered shirts started at \$15 and were usually sold for around \$12, but the price may increase if the embroidered design is intricate. To further explain his frustration over customers who low-balled prices, Arturo Esteban grabbed a women's short sleeve linen shirt. He said, "One woman wanted this for \$5! But I told her, 'No, I can't do that. \$5?! That's what the small children's shirts sell for.' It was insulting! You know! But she kept saying, '\$5. No more.' She wouldn't work with me. [Give and take is expected in haggling]. The material and labor cost more than that. She didn't get it. \$5! Pfft" [translated by author]. When I asked if the woman was a foreigner who might be unaware of the pricing system, he said, "No, she's mestiza. She should know!" [translated by author]. Because visitors to the market expected great deals, they may ask for items at lower prices than vendors feel is fair. This could be upsetting for vendors, who felt their work and identity was being devalued. What was interesting about this example is that Arturo Esteban was not involved in producing linen shirts or any other item that he sold, but he recognized the labor involved and valued these items differently because of his relationship with crafts as an indigenous Otavalan.

Other vendors have echoed Arturo Esteban's impassioned sentiment that Wednesday shoppers visit the market seeking the best deals, unlike Saturday shoppers, who visit the market seeking the experience and mementos of their trip. Although this was a common sentiment expressed by vendors, none could offer insight as to why Wednesday shoppers seem to be low-ball customers. From my observations, it seemed that large tour groups of foreigners were more likely to visit the world-famous Saturday market. These tourists were usually less informed about the market, so they were excited to make purchases and were less familiar with extreme haggling for prices. However, it seemed that people from Latin America were more likely to visit the market mid-week, as they traveled for work, recreation, or to see family. Since they have heard about the market and were familiar with the practice of haggling, that may explain why they tended to seek the lowest prices. Regardless of the explanation, the result was that different actors with different systems of valuation made Otavalan vendors feel devalued as

vendors and as indigenous peoples in a country where racism against people of color still exists.

In addition to customers' price expectations, vendors and guides also had opinions about appropriate prices for Otavalan goods, which created tension. While individual vendors made decisions about the appropriate prices for their items and may choose to sell an item for a slightly higher or lower price depending on the circumstance, there was a generally agreed upon price range for each item that was sold in the market. When select vendors sold items above or below that price range, it created tension with other vendors because it impacted their reputation and ability to make sales.

Concepción told me about a woman with a corner stall, not far from Concepción's stall, who overcharges tourists. Although vendors know each other and usually refer to each other by name, Concepción never used the woman's name, instead referring to her as "that woman." Concepción gave repeated examples of the woman selling items for two or three times the amount that Concepción and other vendors would sell them for.

Can you believe she does that? The guides warn their [tourist] groups not to buy anything from her. I hear them tell the groups, 'Keep walking. Keep looking. Then you'll know what's [a] fair [price].' And that's their job – to help the groups. But that hurts us because we're close to that unfair woman, and the guides tell them to keep walking, so they listen. They think we're unfair, too. They don't stop to ask. We're not like her. She's a bad woman. [Translated by author].

As Concepción explained, this woman's choices affected other vendors in the market. Price gouging was detrimental for other vendors, especially those with stalls near this woman, who would likely lose sales as tourists were instructed to walk further into the market. This practice was also harmful because it hurt the reputation of Otavalan vendors in general, giving the impression that they were not fair negotiators. Many tourists, guides, and even other vendors were becoming quite angry with this woman. As Concepción told me this story, some of her neighboring vendors chimed in, saying things like, "It's wrong! Why would she do that? It makes us mad! It's not just about her, it's about all of us!" [translated by author]. Several vendors and guides have told the woman how unfair this practice is and asked her to stop doing it, but she continues. I asked Concepción why she thought the woman would charge such high prices in the face of

local backlash, to which she replied, “Because she makes money. Tourists [without guides] don’t know better. It’s wrong. It’s not fair [to anyone], but she makes more money” [translated by author]. This woman’s location at the edge of the market gave her opportunities to sell items to tourists who were passing by and did not have time to wander through the entire market. Yet, as Concepción and others voiced: this can impact the reputation of the market and the vendors in it because the woman is a representative of all vendors and of the entire market. Although the woman could earn quite a bit of money from a single sale by charging higher prices than the standard price range, this seemed to be an unsustainable practice. As more people realized they could find better prices at other stalls, customers were increasingly avoiding her stall and her neighbors by extension. Thus, this woman had violated the sense of community vendors share by deviating from the standard range of acceptable prices for goods sold in the market. In this example, vendors were unhappy with a fellow vendor, but it was more common to hear vendors lament the interference of guides in shaping customers’ expectations of prices.

It was common for large tour bus groups to visit the Plaza de Ponchos, accompanied by a guide who would tell them what to expect and how to navigate the market. This included a discussion of what the guide felt to be fair prices. The guide would often accompany the group into the market, and when the group splintered into smaller groups, the guide would check in, serving as translator and helping to facilitate purchases. It was also common for couples and families to hire a local guide to help them navigate and shop in the market. Thus, vendors were accustomed to dealing with guides, and while they understood that informing their groups of fair prices was part of the job of tour guides, vendors sometimes complained that this affected their ability to do business. Concepción said, “What the guide thinks is fair isn’t always fair [from a vendor’s perspective]. They tell them local prices. But those aren’t regular prices. So, when we see guides, we know we’ll sell items, but it’s not always a good sale” [translated by author]. Her comment reflected a few important points. First, vendors recognized that visitors accompanied by guides were often more serious shoppers, who were more likely to purchase items. However, there was a tiered scale of acceptable prices within the market: vendors selling large quantities to other vendors received the lowest prices, locals and

Latinos received the second lowest prices, and white foreigners were charged the highest prices. This pricing scale was based on perceptions about who could afford different prices, as well as how informed the buyer was about the items and about fair prices. Thus, vendors sometimes felt guides interfere with this tiered pricing scale by lobbying for better prices than tourists would normally be charged. For vendors, a “good sale” was one that fit within the expected tiered pricing scale for different types of customers, which balanced maximum profit with the reputation of being a fair vendor. Thus, in the example above, the vendor violated these expectations by overcharging tourists and had a negative reputation as a result.

One day, a foreign couple came to Lucia’s stall, accompanied by a local guide. The couple was white and spoke Spanish and a European language I did not recognize but did not speak English. Lucia took the lead dealing with them as they looked at blankets, while her son, Javier, pulled various blankets they might like. Before Lucia could say anything to the couple, the guide told them in Spanish, “A fair price is \$20. No more” [translated by author]. Vendors usually offer a starting price between \$26-30 for the blankets and will generally haggle with customers to ultimately sell them for between \$20-25. Lucia countered with \$23, expecting a negotiation, but the guide insisted, “There was another stall selling them for \$20. You shouldn’t pay more than \$20. We can always go back” [translated by author]. Given his insistence, Lucia had to concede. Lucia has a large, well-stocked stall, and makes a higher volume of sales than many of the vendors in the market. When I asked her about the interaction, she said, “It’s ok. I don’t worry. It’s better to make the sale and have him [the guide] remember me. I won’t see them [the couple] again, but him [the guide] – probably” [translated by author]. Thus, Lucia was not upset at the guide’s interference in the price because, ultimately, she made a sale and had the opportunity to establish a relationship with a guide. In many conversations over the years, Lucia has repeated that the most important thing about being a vendor in the market is the relationships a vendor has as a member of the vending community. Different vendors have different opinions and relationships with guides, who impact a vendor’s ability to make a “good sale.”

I personally witnessed the importance of relationships in the market when repeat customers intentionally visited Lucia’s stall. While visiting at Lucia’s stall in August

2017, a couple of Indian descent and a Peruvian woman came by. The Indian couple instantly recognized Lucia and reminded the Peruvian woman that she had bought several sweaters from Lucia in the past. The group spoke with each other and with me in English but spoke with Lucia in Spanish. The Indian couple previously lived in the U.S. They first came to Ecuador in 2013 and made several trips to Ecuador before moving to Cotacachi in 2014. The Peruvian woman had also previously lived in the U.S. but had been living in Cotacachi since 2009. They all remarked about the beauty and climate of the region, as well as “how hard-working everyone is.” The Indian man told me, “Here [in Ecuador], they are so hardworking!” Gesturing to the stall, he continued,

Look at all this that they do. I respect that. We love shopping here [in the Plaza de Ponchos], but I don’t like to haggle too much for the lowest price. I know maybe I can get a better price if I try, but I value their work. It’s hard work. It’s worth a few extra dollars for me when I think about how hard they have to work to do this [set up and tear down their stall] every day.

Lucia also remembered the group and joked around with them, saying, “yes, we’re old friends. I couldn’t forget my old friends” [translated by author]. On that day, they did not buy anything from Lucia, but they promised to be back soon and buy from her stall. The man told me they visit the market about once a month and always buy things, often from Lucia because they enjoy speaking with her. Lucia was also well known among vendors for giving fair prices on the low end of standard price ranges. It is possible this group was aware of that, since they visit the market frequently. While it was more common for vendors to establish relationships with guides that will allow them to make sales in the future, vendors like Lucia may also establish relationships with locals who appreciate the familiarity of returning to the same vendor in the future.

Another issue for vendors resulted from customers who have very particular tastes or require focused attention from vendors. While vendors were well versed in the vending strategy of reading customers and providing attentive service, customers tended to pass through the market in groups and batches. This generally meant that a vendor would have lulls of no activity interspersed by moments where she must divide her attention among a group or multiple groups in hopes of making sales. Customers who required a lot of

individual attention or insisted on something very specific made it challenging for vendors to successfully keep everyone happy.

On one occasion, a group of two young men and two young women in their late 20s/early 30s came to Veronica's stall. The group was from France but also spoke Spanish. One of the women wanted an acrylic poncho. Veronica sells these for \$15, but other vendors will sell them for as low as \$10. The woman wanted to wear the poncho with an indigenous style belt, called a *faja*. This is a long, woven strip that does not have a belt buckle or loops but is instead worn by wrapping the belt repeatedly around one's waist and tucking the end into the wrapped belt. The woman was adamant that adding a belt was the only way the poncho would look good on her because otherwise "it would make me look fat!" but also seemed uncertain, asking Veronica, "Can I do that?" [translated by author]. Veronica encouraged her: "I've never seen that, but why not! It's your life, it's your style. You should feel comfortable" [translated by author]. Adding an indigenous belt to a style of poncho made exclusively for non-indigenous customers was in fact rare and perhaps what gave the customer pause. Still, Veronica was supportive, perhaps because dressing comfortably is important to Veronica or perhaps because combining the two items would lead to a larger sale. Veronica helped the customer try on three ponchos in different colors, putting a belt on the woman each time and holding up a mirror, so the customer could see the full effect. The woman asked her friend group for help choosing the color, but they grew antsy as the sequence progressed and encouraged her to "hurry up and decide" as they began wandering to other stalls [translated by author]. Ultimately, she purchased the first poncho option and the *faja* for \$17.

After the group left, Veronica and I picked up the discarded ponchos, belts, and mirror, and returned them to their proper locations. She looked a little flustered from the interaction, so I joked that that was a lot of work for just one sale. While helping the woman, Veronica remained friendly, patient, and supportive; but once the woman left, Veronica's demeanor changed. She looked annoyed when she said to me, "Really? She wants a *faja*, but she can't wear it. What's she going to do when I'm not there [to put the belt on her]? I thought she would try on every poncho and *faja* we have! And her friends did nothing. [They did not help the woman try on the ponchos or the belt, nor did they hold the mirror. Veronica did all of that alone.] And they bought nothing" [translated by

author]. I agreed that it was a lot of time for Veronica to invest in one customer, so I asked why she wrapped the *faja* for the woman each time. It seemed to me that once the woman had seen the belt and poncho paired together, she would have a sense for the style. Veronica answered, “Because she *was* going to buy it! At least she did [buy items]” [translated by author]. Veronica was a good saleswoman, so her vending experience at reading customers may have given her insight into the woman’s seriousness as a shopper, but the way Veronica spoke, it also sounded like she was manifesting a sale through hard work as an attentive vendor. Veronica’s comment about the other members of the group also highlights the challenge of attending to a customer with particular tastes because it is nearly impossible for the vendor to make a sale to anyone else, even members in the same group. Average customers who were less particular and traveled in groups allowed vendors to target the entire group, such that the vendor would often make sales to multiple members of the same group. Watching this interaction, it was obvious that Veronica worked hard to maintain a friendly and positive demeanor with the customer, only revealing her frustration to me afterward when we were alone.

Another challenge that both vendors and tourists faced was overcoming language barriers. As I described above, many Otavaleños speak Kichwa as their first language and Spanish as their second language out of necessity. Power dynamics have created generational trends regarding fluency in both Kichwa and Spanish, and although many vendors have some knowledge of two languages, they often expressed a desire to also be fluent in English, since that would make transactions with tourists easier. Many tourists from the U.S. and Europe who visited Otavalo were not fluent in Spanish. Some knew as few as “five words in Spanish,” a running joke among the vendors [translated by author]. Some of these tourists traveled with tour groups and tour guides, who were able to translate for them. Yet, many traveled as families or as part of mission trips and did not realize their lack of Spanish fluency until they were in Ecuador. Some made an effort to have conversations with their limited Spanish and gestures, while others attempted to have conversations speaking entirely in English and hoping Ecuadorians would understand. This was frustrating for both vendors and tourists, who had trouble communicating because of language barriers.

One day in September 2017, a man from Texas came by. I was seated between Alicia and Emilia's stalls, which are located on either side of a concrete *redondo*. Their stalls neighbor Lucia's stall in the market, so I could easily converse with all three women. The man first asked Lucia (in English) how much the white hand-embroidered aprons cost. Lucia's English is very limited, but she later told me she "could guess what he wanted" [translated by author]. She started at \$12, to which he immediately said in English "No, too expensive." She went down to \$10 and used a mixture of Spanish and her limited English to try to make a sale. The man would not make a counteroffer, which is expected by vendors for haggling transactions. Instead, he kept repeating in English "That's too much. That's too expensive." He walked away from Lucia, and other customers came to Lucia's stall. Meanwhile, the man spotted the same aprons at Alicia's stall. While he looked through Alicia's selection of aprons, I made small talk with him and learned he had spent the past five months living in Cuenca, which he thought was so beautiful, he wanted to live there fulltime. He was on his way to the U.S. to get everything in order for his two-year visa but was delayed in Quito because of hurricane Irma. He decided to join a couple of tours out of Quito to pass the time, telling me the agenda: "today to Otavalo, tomorrow to 'a volcano,'" although he did not know which volcano.

He then asked Alicia (in English), "If I wanted to buy one of your aprons to hang on my kitchen wall at home [in Texas], how much would it cost?" He looked expectantly at me, before asking me to translate for him. Although he had looked at Alicia when he spoke, she did not realize the question was directed to her because he had been conversing with me in English and made no attempt to address her in Spanish. His entire visit went like this: he spoke English, never used Spanish, and looked to me to translate for him. Alicia and Emilia did not understand most of what he said, but they listened attentively, hoping to catch words they might know as clues to the conversation. With me serving as translator, the man finally settled on a white hand-embroidered apron and a few small tapestries for him to use as decorations and gifts when he returned to the U.S. While I knew tourists visited Ecuador with limited Spanish skills, I was surprised to interact with someone who wanted to live long-term in Ecuador with virtually no Spanish skills. Rather than being frustrated by the encounter, Alicia and Emilia said, "This is why

we need to know English!” [translated by author]. In their experiences, it was common to interact with tourists who spoke only or mostly in English. Their solution was to try to learn more English words and to encourage their children to take their English classes in school seriously. Referring to her inability to partake in the English conversation, Alicia jokingly said, “I’m only annoyed I don’t know what he said because I’m nosy. I want to know his life. Tell me everything!” [translated by author]. Although they did not react negatively to the experience because I was there to serve as translator, they acknowledged that it can be frustrating when no one is around to translate because language barriers prevent customers from expressing their desires, which often prevents vendors from making sales.

Otavalan vendors faced many challenges, ranging from interactions with customers, vendors, and tour guide to issues arising from the unstable nature of outdoor, open-air tourist markets. These challenges have an additional layer of significance due to the importance of crafts for indigenous Otavalan identity and what that relationship may look like in the future.

5.3.1 Economic Downturns and Tourism Decline

It was increasingly common during my research in 2017 and 2018 to see the Plaza de Ponchos nearly empty, even on Wednesdays, which were normally busy market days. On one such day in early August, I wrote in my field notes: There were almost no tourists in the market; didn’t seem to be any big tour groups, just families, which were mostly from Latin America. The decline in visitors and lack of activity in the market was a topic of frequent conversation with vendors. Vendors usually explained this in terms of a decline in tourism due to economic downturns around the world. Because vendors are involved in global craft circulations and many have either personally traveled abroad as vendors or have relatives/contacts who have traveled abroad, they are attuned to economics and politics on a global scale, well aware that globalization has intertwined their local livelihood with situations around the globe. Several vendors see the future for Otavalans as tied to crafts; interview responses about the importance of craft production and vending are below.

Ricardo is a local mestizo who visits the market infrequently, so he is not intimately attuned to the market like indigenous vendors, but even he noticed that there were fewer customers in the market than usual when we visited on a Saturday in July 2017. He blamed it on the “global crisis,” in which people “don’t have as much disposable income” and so are traveling less [translated by author]. That day, Lucia told me, “There are not many tourists now [in 2017], but that there were many last year” [translated by author]. She said that her immediate family “had a good year last year” [translated by author], so they could weather the decline in tourists and sales. Compare that to a comment Lucia made to me during my pre-dissertation fieldwork in June 2014: “There’s no one here today. But it’s like this. Some days you sell a lot, others no. But I’m always here!” [translated by author]. Although she remained mostly optimistic, Lucia’s tone had shifted over the years from acceptance of the natural ebbs and flows to concern over the decline in tourists visiting the market. By 2018, she was concerned that there were so few tourists during the summer, which was normally the peak of tourists visiting the market.

On a Wednesday in early June 2018, Andrea said, “it was a bad day” [translated by author] for her in terms of sales. Andrea had a corner stall in the market, so she had a direct line of sight of tourists entering and exiting the Plaza de Ponchos, especially for large bus groups. Despite seeing tourists in the market and buses dropping people off, she only sold three small ponchos and two headbands. “I don’t know where they’re going, but it’s not here,” she said, gesturing to her stall [translated by author]. This was the first time I had ever heard her describe her day as a “bad day.” Andrea was very religious, which gave her an optimistic outlook. She usually described even painful events (like growing up without a father) with a smile, saying, “God has a plan and a way” [translated by author; a common phrase in our many conversations]. During the years I had known Andrea, she had always put a positive spin on the situation or shrugged it off when she did not make many sales. While the lack of tourists and sales had been a frequent topic of conversation with many vendors who worried their livelihood was threatened, Andrea’s comment was impactful because it was so out of character. For me, it drove home the sense of fear and uncertainty that many vendors were feeling about the tourism decline

related to global economic downturns, which was further exacerbated by an influx of Venezuelan refugees into Ecuador, and specifically, into vending spaces in Otavalo.

The following week, the problem of a lack of customers continued. At first, it seemed they were not many customers in the Plaza de Ponchos, so it was a slow market day, which was to be expected given the flux of a tourist market. Lucia told me she had only sold one jacket but was hoping for better sales throughout the day. As the day went on, it became apparent that there were a number of people shopping in the market (several families of 5+), but rather than visitors coming and going, which gives a sense of excitement and activity to the market experience, the same groups spent the entire day in the market and walked through the entire Plaza. Some bought more than others, but there were opportunities for vendors to make sales. Concepción told me, “There were some people [here] today, but no one wanted to buy anything” [translated by author]. This was a common sentiment expressed by many of my contacts in the market: there were people present, but no one wanted to buy anything; or alternatively, there were people present who were clearly buying items from other people because they walked past carrying shopping bags, but they did not want to buy from that particular vendor. Both scenarios were upsetting for vendors because their livelihoods are unstable and dependent on others.

By late August-early September each year, the number of tourists coming to Otavalo drastically decreases because summer vacation is over, and families have children back in school. Vendors know that this happens every year around the same time, and many mention it to me when they describe their lives and vendors and their work in the Plaza de Ponchos. Yet, each year, many vendors still expressed concern at the low numbers of people in the street or the market once summer vacations for the U.S. came to an end, commenting how the market was so empty. Many vendors had a sense that it was harder to make sales now than it was in the past. They said they used to make decent sales daily, but now, days would pass without making any sales. Despite this, they still saw the future as strictly tied to production and vending, as described by the interview responses below.

One question I asked in semi-structured ethnographic interviews was: How important do you think craft production will be for Otavalans in the future? How

important do you think selling crafts will be for Otavalans in the future? [translated by author as: ¿Cuán importante cree que será la producción artesanal para los Otavaleños en el futuro? ¿Cuán importante cree que vender artesanías será para Otavaleños en el futuro?] (See Appendix for Interview Guide). The general consensus among all interviewees was that producing and vending crafts would remain important for Otavaleños in the future. Some specific responses encapsulate those sentiments.

Carolina responded, “Production will be important in the future because our future generations will develop new designs and colors. Production is changing with time, and we must be open-minded. Vending will be important because we know our own *artesanías*, so we can sell it the best” [translated by author]. Her answer highlights the importance of local, indigenous control over crafts and a lack of middlemen involvement. Isabel answered,

Production will not be so important in the future because we can do everything with machines or import it, but some products will be around forever. Vending will be important because even people without a profession [or other skills] can sell items. As current vendors die, we will need a new generation of vendors. There is always going to be a demand. That’s the circle of life. [Translated by author].

Her response highlights the connection many Otavalans make between small-scale, handmade production and crafts, which is often distinguished from more large-scale production, like machinated hand weaving occurring in Peguche. Thus, while she said production would be less important in the future, she meant that small-scale, handmade production would likely be less important in the future because it will likely be eclipsed by machinated hand weaving production.

In a joint interview with neighbors Emilia and Alicia, and Alicia’s brother Félix, Félix said,

Production will be advancing [through increased mechanization]. It would be good to maintain a place that conserves the production of *artesanías*, but we need federal support to not lose that [knowledge of manual production techniques], while still commercializing to survive and be competitive. We don’t need a museum, but a workshop. [Translated by author].

Interestingly, Félix was not involved in any of the workshop/museum/stores, nor was he aware of their existence. He was clear in highlighting the importance of teaching and action more than simple preservation of knowledge. He continued, “The future of selling crafts: The local government should have a specialized *artesanías* market – like an artisan center and an industrial center – so we are able to export and sell individual items and wholesale. But I don’t know if it’ll happen because we’re modernizing” [translated by author]. He implied that handmade artisan goods will become increasingly rare due to the more frequent use of mechanized hand weaving. Still, the group agreed that crafts would remain important for Otavalans in the future.

Thus, while the decline in visitors and lack of activity in the market was a topic of frequent conversation with vendors, most Otavalan vendors saw their futures intimately tied with crafts. Despite vending in markets around the world where they share market spaces with others as they seek out shifting global market niches, Otavalans may feel their market at home is threatened when Ecuador experiences times of change. For example, the Venezuelan refugee crisis led to an influx of Venezuelans living in Ecuador and vending in informal market sectors. Some Otavalan vendors felt threatened by this influx of vendors into Otavalo, which is described in more detail in Chapter 6. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a drastic decline in tourist visitors to Ecuador, which made it impossible for many vendors to continue to sell goods in the Plaza de Ponchos, which is described in more detail in Chapter 7. Thus, it is not only economic downturns that may impact the Otavalan tourist market, and vendors are acutely aware of global issues that have local repercussions.

5.3.2 Global Climate Change

Because the Plaza de Ponchos is an outdoor, open-air market, vendors were acutely attuned to daily weather and general climate trends. Vendors frequently discussed “global climate change” (as they called it [translated by author]) with me. In the U.S., global warming/climate change has become a politicized topic, with many individuals and politicians debating the validity of global warming as well as appropriate reactions and responses to it. As such, it is a topic that many people in the U.S. are hesitant to discuss, and when they do broach the topic, it seems like a carefully crafted argument.

Therefore, I was surprised to hear so many vendors openly discuss with me global climate change as a simple matter of fact and learn that this is not a politicized issue in Ecuador in the way it is in the U.S.

As described above, the weather was a major factor in how vendors set up the items on display and protected them from the elements. The wet/rainy season in Ecuador is generally acknowledged to last from October to May, which is known for being wet, rainy, and windy, while the remaining months are more moderate. Yet, there was a general consensus among vendors that this climate pattern was shifting: periods of sun, rain, and wind were all believed to be more intense, which was challenging for agriculture as well as vending in an outdoor, open-air market. Commenting on general changes in her lifetime, Andrea said, “The sun and rain are so strong now. Not just storms, but all the time. The ground is drier, so agriculture is harder” [translated by author]. Hence, global climate change is affecting life for Otavaleños. In addition to the concerns for vendors in the market, it was also particularly challenging for agriculture.

On a sunny, windy day in July 2017, while talking with Lucia at her stall, she jumped up and said, “The sun is so strong! It’s too much. More than normal” [translated by author], and proceeded to cover the hand-embroidered tablecloths with a woven tablecloth to protect them. Covering the items protected them from discoloration due to the sun, but it also prevented tourists from seeing them when they walk by. Despite the weather that day, she reminded me, “The weather this week is crazy! Today, it’s so sunny, it hurts. But Saturday, there was so much rain and wind! Out of nowhere! It knocked down items, and everything got wet. Poor Karla [her daughter]. Tsk. Ask her about Saturday” [translated by author].

When I visited with Karla, I asked her about Saturday, like her mother had suggested. Karla responded, “Oof! The rain and wind! It was like this [makes a noise and motions with her hands]. What a pain! Everything got wet. Then, it’s so hard to pack [because you want everything to dry]” [translated by author]. Ideally, textiles should not be put away wet, so they do not grow mold or mildew. Yet, this was often not possible. Sometimes, vendors would take the wettest items home to dry, or put them on top in the *maletas* so they will be the first items out the next day to dry. Packing wet items poses a challenge for vendors. Karla continued, “But I was lucky. My mom didn’t put up plastic

[tarps] because she says they are a hassle, and she thought it would be nice weather. But I had a feeling. So, I put up plastic [over her own stall]" [translated by author]. In addition to the usual assortment of items found at most stalls, Karla and her husband sold DVDs in a street stall on Saturdays (on Saturdays, another family uses the space they normally occupy during the week). They used a TV and DVD player as advertising for the movies and music they sold. If Karla had not covered her stall with a plastic tarp that day, the heavy rain that came on quickly would have ruined her DVDs and equipment.

Karla's comment highlights the decision vendors had to make about the best method to protect their items that day: plastic tarps were best if there might be rain, but they will tear if the wind is strong; cotton sheets provided some relief from the sun and were more resistant to the wind because they allowed air to pass through the fibers, but they offered no protection from the rain. Tarps must be replaced frequently, so vendors tried to extend their lives as much as possible. Sometimes when the weather was too extreme, vendors would simply leave the market early. They decided that staying in the market longer in hopes of making a sale was not worth the potential damage to their items, including the infrastructure of their stall (like tarps, large umbrellas, etc.). Most vendors packed up their stalls between 5-7 PM to head home for the day. One windy day, Alicia kept retrieving items that the wind blew away from her stall. Looking around the market and realizing it was mostly empty of shoppers, she said, "No more!" [translated by author], and began packing up at 3:40 PM. One neighbor teased her for packing up so early, but other vendors had already left before Alicia began packing her stall. Alicia told me, "I can't stay when it's like this. And it's like this more now. Global climate change has made the weather here more intense. The wind is stronger, the sun is hotter, it's all just more. No, it's time to leave" [translated by author].

Despite the impact of the weather on their items, their infrastructure, and their overall comfort vending all day in an outdoor, open-air market, sometimes unexpected weather benefited vendors in the form of strategic sales. Many tourists expected all of Ecuador to have warm weather, thinking of the Amazon and coastal regions, without realizing the impact of the Andes Mountains' altitude on the climate. Because many tour groups visited Otavalo for the day before heading to the Galapagos Islands for a week, it was common for tourists to wear shorts, sleeveless tops, and sandals when visiting

Otavalo. As described earlier, Otavalo's climate is spring-like. On sunny days, some tourists may be comfortable in their beachwear, but on cool, windy, rainy days, they often found their wardrobe insufficient. On these cooler days, vendors often sold many sweaters, ponchos, shawls, scarves, jackets, and even hats. On one surprisingly cold day in June, I went to the market wearing pants, a long sleeve shirt, a lightweight sweater, a lightweight 'fashion' scarf, and still found myself cold. Noticing my discomfort, Concepción lent me a shawl to wrap around me to keep warm, so I did not have to return home for a warmer jacket. Her aunt Ana Lucia joined the fun, and put a winter hat on me, saying, "You look like a popsicle!" [translated by author]. The hat stayed on only long enough for Ana Lucia to take a photo as a joke (See Figure 5.30), prompting me to make my best 'I'm frozen face,' and show it to my mom "so she'll know she doesn't need to worry – your friends take care of you!" [translated by author]. When I took off the hat, I tried to give back the shawl as well, but Concepción would not allow it, saying, "You need it. You're a popsicle. Keep it for now, no worries" [translated by author]. Looking around at the unprepared tourists who were wearing shorts, sleeveless tops, and sandals, Concepción teased, "You will be my model. They must be frozen, and they'll see you look warm [in the shawl]. Now, they'll know what to buy" [translated by author]. Although we were chilly, the vendors were happy to make so many sales of cool-weather items due to the weather.



Figure 5.30 Photo of the author taken by Ana Lucia as a joke, turning the camera on the ethnographer as fair play. Vendors can make sales to visitors unprepared for Otavalan weather.

5.4 Conclusions

Indigenous Otavaleños describe their lives in relation to *artesanías*, or handicrafts/crafts, but there is a paradox between the production and selling of Otavalan handicrafts. Otavalan women vendors often produce portable handmade crafts – like crocheting, knitting, embroidery, jewelry, etc. – during their days in the market, which I suggest is significant in the performance of female indigeneity for tourists visiting the Plaza de Ponchos in Otavalo, despite the Otavalan hierarchy of crafts that minimizes the significance of portable handmade craft production in favor of woven textiles produced on a floor loom or via machinated hand weaving technology. Women have been excluded from craft communities and excluded from the identities associated with those crafting communities. Many female indigenous vendors feel pressure to dress *de anaco*, or wear traditional indigenous clothing, to visibly perform their indigenous identity so that they

meet tourists' expectations in an effort to help them make sales. As argued earlier, indigenous Otavalan women's identity is for sale along with and through their crafts. As the items available in the Plaza de Ponchos continue to shift, it is possible that portable handmade crafts produced by Otavalan women vendors will increase in importance as a way to visibly demonstrate indigenous Otavalan identity and provide a sense of authenticity to the market.

Because of their involvement in global circulations, Otavaleños are attuned to consumer desires, as I have noted. Producers are keenly aware that consumer desires differ, depending on the markets. The Plaza de Ponchos market is in transition from being viewed by vendors and consumers as an artisan market to an outdoor market where crafts and mass-produced items are sold side by side. Vendors are adapting to consumer demands for small, cheap goods by diversifying their products to suit broader tastes, simultaneously challenge notions of authenticity as vendors strive to meet foreign tourists' expectations. The introduction of new items that have been adapted for local production and imported goods has caused vendors to develop new marketing strategies. These strategies are viewed by many mestizos and some indigenous as a loss of artisan identity, but for indigenous vendors, they are a necessary adaptation for their livelihood. Women are primary actors in this transition and are changing the view of women as craft producers.

While the perception of the market is shifting, the local government has also proposed changes the infrastructure and operation of the Plaza de Ponchos, without consulting indigenous vendors. Beginning in 2018, the Venezuelan refugee crisis resulted in an influx of Venezuelans entering the informal vending sector. Thus, inter-ethnic relations and power dynamics may feel like external pressures for indigenous Otavalan vendors regarding their access to space and their vending livelihoods.

CHAPTER 6. POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF CRAFT PRODUCTION: INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND POWER

Indigenous populations are often considered stewards of the land; they are stereotyped by others as being more closely connected with nature, and therefore responsible for maintaining and preserving nature, even as it is expected that other populations will exploit the environment for economic gain and convenience. Concerned by the impact of craft production on the environment, a growing number of mestizo artisans in Otavalo, Ecuador have begun creating recycled and/or eco-friendly art that mainly caters to foreign tourists. Indigenous Otavaleños have faced pressure to change their production methods to meet growing demands by tourists for small, cheap goods and have often willingly done so through innovative techniques that many indigenous artisans see as necessary progress for craft production to continue. Both foreign and local non-indigenous populations were often alarmed at the changes indigenous artisans were willing to make and voice these concerns under the banners of “authenticity and tradition.” Indigenous producers must navigate the tension between authenticity and innovation, while staying relevant in an informal tourist market and providing goods at prices that meet consumers’ demands. The competition between vendors can place a strain on social relations, especially as ideas about appropriate materials and production techniques are increasingly based on stereotypes about the relationships different ethnic groups can and should have with the land and in regard to their social positions. In light of this, I argue that both foreign and local non-indigenous populations’ perceptions about indigenous peoples’ relationship to nature and craft production is more about power and social status than about environmental stewardship.

Further, this research investigates how Otavalan women are navigating craft work and the commodification of identity in relation to changing market conditions. Ideas about gender have been revised through craft production, which is changing in the current context of dispossession from land and transnational emigration. Women are caught as vessels of indigeneity and perceived by both outsiders and Otavalans as “more Indian” (de la Cadena 1995), as is reflected by Otavalan women’s market visibility and dressing *de anaco*. Otavalans’ identities are commodified along with and through their crafts. Yet, the current shift in consumers’ desired goods and the influx of Venezuelan refugees may

further disenfranchise indigenous Otavalan women. Thus, indigenous Otavalan women are multiply marginalized through their gender, cultural and national citizenship, and indigeneity. Their social position is further complicated by the expectation that women while be vessels of indigeneity, which creates further tensions between authenticity and innovation in craft production and distribution, as well as in performance of female indigenous identity. An analysis of the political ecology of craft production must examine the ways in which indigenous Otavalan women are multiply marginalized to understand contemporary inter-ethnic relations and power.

In addition to the established Ecuadorian indigenous and mestizo vendors, there has been an influx of informal vendors as Venezuelan refugees fled their home state and sought temporary strategies of survival through selling trinkets in public spaces. The reception of Venezuelan refugees varied, but Ecuadorian indigenous and mestizo vendors were growing increasingly wary as the number of Venezuelans increased and the likelihood that they would compete for sales in informal markets also increased.

In this chapter, I analyze the interaction between people and nature in terms of craft production and distribution, especially with regard to materials used and waste produced. What are the impacts of changes in production methods and importing mass-produced goods? Does this new trend of mestizo-produced recycled and/or eco-friendly art truly have a positive environmental impact, or is it simply a fad that caters to the growing number of environmentally concerned Euro-American tourists? Additionally, I analyze the interactions between Ecuadorians and the growing number of Venezuelan refugees as competing informal vendors and co-users of public space. Can the market for small, cheap trinkets sustain both Ecuadorian vendors and the influx of Venezuelan vendors? What will the relations between these groups look like in the future, given the current economic and sociopolitical climate? This chapter explores these tensions through the environmental context of craft work and marketing.

6.1 Indigenous Peoples and the Land

For many indigenous peoples, nature and/or the land hold cultural and spiritual significance, in addition to its potential to provide sustenance (The Coolangatta Statement *in* Read et al. 2006:234), so much so that many non-indigenous people stereotypically

envision indigenous peoples as inextricably linked with nature. In fact, many definitions of indigeneity – like the UN and Cobo definitions – rely on a link to the land (McIntosh 2001:23). In The Coolangatta Statement – frequently cited by scholars and activists alike for its importance in international indigenous rights and recognition – presented at the World Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education in 1999, the collaborators argued it is our “relationship with Mother Earth that characterizes Indigenous cultures. This relationship enables Indigenous peoples to negotiate, use and maintain the land, and to build and rebuild the social structures needed for cultural survival” (The Coolangatta Statement *in* Read et al. 2006:234).

While important in recognizing ancestral and cultural connections to land, these land-based definitions of indigeneity fail to include those who have had their lands taken from them and can also open the definition to include impoverished people with land who have not faced the colonial oppression that is increasingly being recognized as a defining characteristic of indigenous identity. These land-based definitions also fail to account for increasingly diverse populations and the necessity of inter-ethnic relations, as well as following stereotypes of indigenous people. For some authors and the purpose of this research, indigeneity cannot be defined purely on a land-based relationship. Indigeneity has taken on an identity that implies resistance to hegemony, linked to “a claim to historical injustice” based on racial and ethnic othering of indigenous populations (Canessa 2012:69). Part of that “claim to historical injustice” (Canessa 2012:69) and the forcible seizure of land by non-indigenous people and governments has resulted in the intensification of land for indigenous populations as a form of cultural heritage and resistance.

Indigenous identity often remains linked with ancestral lands or familial land holdings because members of indigenous communities have witnessed other indigenous groups who have been stripped of their land rights and experienced firsthand what this kind of loss can mean for one’s cultural and ethnic identity. For example, the indigenous Aymara of Bolivia have been economically successful by engaging with global capitalism in large part due to maintaining indigenous values and practices, which have strengthened communities and reinforced traditional beliefs (Tassi 2016). Although there have been land reforms that have reshaped access and use, the history of agriculture as

“indigenous economic spaces” left to be managed by “local parishes according to indigenous forms and practices of authority” has “made it impossible for official institutions to establish conventional forms of agrarian capitalism in highland rural area[s]” (Tassi 2016:14). Thus, indigenous control of farming land in Bolivia bolsters indigenous values and practices that allow Aymaras, Tassi argues, to engage with global capitalism strategically.

Otavaleños of Ecuador provide another example of land’s importance increasing for a group’s indigenous identity, while its capacity for self-sufficiency declines. When time studies were conducted, Colloredo-Mansfeld found that “farming is little more than an interruption in routines dominated by commercial work, social activities, and domestic chores” because such a small percentage of time was spent in agricultural work and because it provides such low output relative to other forms of work (1999:20). Yet, agricultural work and land ownership remain central to Otavaleños’ identity as indigenous peoples. When asked why they continue to farm when most Otavaleños’ income comes from crafts or other work because it is no longer possible to be self-sufficient by farming or compete with large farms, “‘The Indian must farm,’ Galo Ajala answered, when I put the question to him. ‘It is wrong to leave one’s fields abandoned’” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:91). Thus, land ownership and working the land remains a point of pride, a form of economic diversification, and an essential part of indigenous identity for Otavaleños.

Unfortunately, another consequence of this link between indigenous peoples and land is that it often provides justification for stereotypes held by non-indigenous peoples to believe indigenous peoples are more closely connected with nature, and therefore disproportionately responsible for maintaining and preserving nature. During the June 1990 indigenous protests over land claims in Ecuador, many non-indigenous Ecuadorians were shocked that their stereotypes of indigenous peoples were challenged: “Natives were not simple peasants, ‘guardians of the earth,’ living according to timeless values and rituals outside the concerns of the twentieth century. On the contrary, indigenous life had a sharp political and economic edge” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:4). Carmen Martínez Novo and her colleagues have described more recent political actions of the indigenous movement in Ecuador (2021; Martínez Novo et al. 2018). These stereotypes view

indigenous populations as stewards of the land, even as it is expected that other populations will exploit the environment for economic gain and convenience. When native peoples violate these stereotypes, they are often met with poor reactions, and social and economic relations suffer.

6.2 Indigenous Artisans: “Stewards of Nature”

The general conception of indigenous peoples creates a paradox that often links their identities to craft production and agricultural labor, while simultaneously discriminating against them for the poverty that is associated with these types of livelihoods (de la Torre 1999; Shlossberg 2015:12; Canessa 2012). Despite negative stereotypes non-indigenous people hold, indigenous people actively challenge these notions in an effort to alter their conditions: “Challenging the stereotype that local populations are static and primitive, the authors show how mountain and indigenous people organize to question global capitalist transformations and to propose alternative futures” (Martínez Novo et al 2018:83). “The concept of internal colonialism” explains why many indigenous peoples still experience oppression and discrimination even after colonial periods officially end, which describes the situation in Otavalo (Martínez Novo et al 2018:84). In *Undoing Multiculturalism* (2021), Carmen Martínez Novo describes the Ecuadorian government’s shift during and after Correa’s presidency to a stance that misappropriates elements of the indigenous movement while simultaneously diminishing the agentive roles of indigenous populations as meaningful actors with whom the government must engage: “This paternalist indigenismo was accompanied by a symbolic construction of the mestizo as the embodiment of the nation and as the active subject” (Martínez Novo 2021:65-66).

This is not unique to Otavalo, but rather, this context of dispossession and displacement is a phenomenon observed in many mountain regions worldwide, as Kingsolver and Balasundaram observe in *Global Mountain Regions* (2018). Those in power need marginalized peoples – like indigenous peoples and often those living in mountain regions – to be repositories of culture and then vilify them for being ‘backward.’ Kingsolver and Balasundaram write, “The paradox is that this label can be both used disparagingly as an indication of social inferiority and with reverence to refer

to sacred zones at the heart of cultures and religions. Mountain ranges are often the sites of violent contestations of national borders, political philosophies, and resource ownership” (2018:4). Further, while outsiders may label these people and regions as poor, the internal perspective may be quite different. Writing about Appalachian communities, Kingsolver and Balasundaram note, “they have recognized that being ‘cash poor’ does not equate to poverty in all things, and that in many ways their valley and their community have resources, relationships, and traditions that have potential for sustainable livelihoods” (2018:4). This sentiment certainly applies to Andean regions like Otavalo, as well.

This research builds on previous studies by analyzing Otavalan production strategies as influencing not only the items produced for the market, but also what “authentic” Otavalan crafts and people look like in the marketplace, and assessing how this may be changing as imported goods undercut locally produced items to meet tourists’ demands for small, cheap souvenirs. During my initial phase of dissertation research from July-October 2017, I set out to investigate how global pressures and the push to commodify ethnicity encourage female craft production, transform gender relations, and affect the region. Upon returning home and beginning data analysis, I was struck by the reaction of consumers to indigenous and mestizo artisans and vendors. It was expected that indigenous artisans must use environmentally conscious production methods, and disappointment, embarrassment, and shame were expressed by local mestizos who had learned of the widespread reliance on mechanized hand weaving in textile production. Alternately, mestizo artisans who had begun creating recycled and/or eco-friendly art that mainly caters to tourists from the U.S. and Europe were seen as innovators concerned by the impact of craft production on the environment. They had earned the reputation of guardians of nature, which was inherently expected of indigenous populations who were villainized if they ‘failed’ in this role, while mestizos who made conservation efforts were seen as eco-saviors.

The idea that indigenous peoples must be stewards of nature in Ecuador may, in part, be linked to the indigenous movement’s sociopolitical agenda. The indigenous movement in Ecuador has a long history of fighting for expanded rights and recognition in decolonizing Ecuador, and different time periods are associated with different focal

points in the ongoing efforts: “Environmental conflicts and the damage done by natural resource extraction became increasingly salient items on the agenda of the indigenous movement in the first decade of the 2000s” (Martínez Novo 2021:42). The prominence of environmental conflicts to the indigenous movement may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes non-indigenous people hold about indigenous people being linked to the land. A closer look at Otavalan craft practices highlights the materials and waste involved in craft production and distribution and how Otavaleños navigate the tensions between authenticity and innovation, especially as younger generations increasingly aspire to non-craft related careers.

6.2.1 Materials and Waste

Craft production techniques used by indigenous Otavaleños in the past can be considered environmentally friendly because they relied on sustainable materials provided by their natural surroundings – sticks, plants, wood. Because production was so labor and time intensive and because the demand for handmade and therefore expensive goods was low, producers did not have to worry about overharvesting or detrimentally impacting the environment for craft production. The famous *shigra* style bag – cylindrical open-top bags/purses with knotted handles (See Figure 6.1) – and a pre-Columbian spinning technique (See Figure 6.5) exemplify the ways in which Otavaleños utilized items provided by nature in the past, but production techniques and materials have changed to meet increased consumer demands.



Figure 6.1 This *shigra*, an open top cylindrical bag with knotted handles, is famous for being made in Ecuador. This example is made from natural cabuya fibers. Photo source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/citlali/3665241043>

Traditionally, *shigra* bags were made from a natural fiber called cabuya that is harvested from the *penca* plant. The *penca* plant looks similar to an agave plant and grows on the mountains surrounding villages (See Figure 6.2). From the *penca* plant, one can split the spine open and peel the fiber down the length of the spine to produce a thread, called cabuya. Rather than tying various fibers together to create a longer thread or a sort of ball of yarn, artisans who work with cabuya simply use the length of the fiber and then move on to the next thread. Because of this, it is better to obtain “thread” from the bigger, taller plants, which produce longer fibers naturally. This also ensures young, small plants will reach maturity before harvesting, which is more ecologically sustainable long-term. Once one has collected the fibers, they are soaked in warm water to remove the natural green hue. After soaking, they become a white fiber that can be dyed different colors and crocheted into *shigra* bags: cylindrical open-top bags/purses with knotted

handles. Because the cabuya fibers are stripped of their natural green hue before being dyed, and because they were often dyed with natural dyes, the colors featured in *shigras* made from cabuya are often muted, natural tones (See Figure 6.1). The cabuya fibers are also coarse to the touch and quite fine – more like thread than yarn – which causes these bags to have a tight knit and almost abrasive texture that is tough on the hands of the producer.



Figure 6.2 One can split the spine of a *penca* plant to produce a threadlike fiber called cabuya, traditionally used to create *shigra* bags. [Author photo]

However, because this style of bag is growing increasingly popular, many artisans have started crocheting these bags with acrylic yarns, rather than cabuya fibers. One can fairly easily tell by looking and touching the bags: cabuya fibers can be dyed to nearly any color, but they almost always look more earthen in their tones due to the dyeing process, and they are a rougher texture than those made of acrylic yarn. A general rule for these bags: if it is brightly colored or features saturated hues and it is smooth to the touch, then it is made from acrylic yarn (See Figure 6.3). One artisan crochets *shigras* from acrylic yarns but prefers to make *shigras* from fine white cotton because it yields a finished product closer to the bags made from cabuya; because she is the only artisan to take this approach, she feels it gives her a competitive edge to have a unique product (See Figure 6.4). Yet, most tourists do not know the difference. Oddly, *shigra* bags cost

around the same amount whether they are made from acrylic yarn or cabuya fibers, which certainly takes more time and skill to work with.



Figure 6.3 With the *shigra* style growing increasingly popular and emblematic of Ecuadorian crafts, many producers have started using acrylic yarns – cheaper and easier to work with – instead of cabuya fibers. Notice the more vibrant and saturated hues of these bags, which are difficult to achieve with natural dyes. [Author photo]

Obviously, there is a difference in environmental impact when comparing cabuya fibers with acrylic yarn. Cabuya fibers are locally sourced, meaning there is no carbon footprint to ship them. They are also usually dyed using natural dyes, which means the waste from the dyeing process is not toxic to humans or the environment. Finally, any waste cabuya fibers that are not used in crocheting a *shigra* will decompose once discarded. Acrylic yarns, however, are generally imported, which means there are carbon emissions associated with their production and shipping. Acrylic yarns contain synthetic fibers and are also dyed using synthetic dyes, which allow for more vibrant, saturated hues, but the waste from the dyeing process is often harmful to both humans and the environment, as the runoff often contaminates water sources. Because acrylic yarns contain synthetic fibers made from plastic, waste materials that are discarded will not decompose. Yet, the ease of purchasing and working with acrylic yarns is a major draw for craft producers who do not have the time, knowledge, or resources to invest in the

harvest and processing of cabuya. Also, the texture of cabuya fibers is rough and can be abrasive on a producer's skin when crocheting bags. This shift in materials suits producers and consumers alike, who typically do not consider the environmental impact of craft production.



Figure 6.4 One female artisan uses fine cotton to create a unique dupe for traditional *shigras* made from cabuya. Notice the crochet hook in the incomplete bag on the left, highlighting the visible performance of female indigenous Otavalan identity as she creates crafts in the market. [Author photo]

Inspired by a photo of a woman spinning yarn during a visit to a workshop/museum/store, I sought to learn more about pre-Columbian spinning techniques (See Figure 6.5). During previous research trips, I had seen spinning on the Spanish style wheel demonstrated and knew that even this form of spinning was quite rare, as the preference is for large-scale factory produced acrylic yarn. When I inquired about the pre-Columbian spinning technique, I found only one elder woman who knew the technique and who enlisted her daughter to gather the necessary materials. Thankfully, I already had a close relationship with this family, as they have been some of my “key informants” throughout my various research trips.



Figure 6.5 Displayed in Peguche Wasi, this woman depicts a pre-Columbian spinning technique. [Author photo]

Elena sent her daughter Andrea and I up the mountain behind their house in Peguche in search of a stick from the sicsi plant, which would have been used as a spindle in pre-Columbian spinning (See Figure 6.6). The sicsi plant is a large, thin grass-like plant, but the sticks on which the flowers grow are the important component for spinning. Elena informed me that it is better to harvest these sticks when they are fresh, rather than when they have dried out. In order to spin, one needs the sicsi stick, as well as a longer stick/pole, the origin of which is less important. The diameter and the length of the sicsi depend on the spinner's preference, and do not affect the yarn that will be produced. Elena demonstrated that once raw pure cotton wool has been cleaned and carded, it is wrapped around the longer stick, which is held between one's knees. The person then twists the sicsi spindle in their right hand, while the left hand slowly feeds the wool in order to create a thread/yarn (See Figure 6.7). Elena said it was always done this way, but I assume it could be reversed if one were left-handed. From the brief demonstration, it was apparent that this spinning method requires a lot of time and talent. Elena joked about the difficulty and her inadequacy due to such infrequent use of this spinning technique. Throughout my inquiries with various people, Elena is the only person alive that still remembers this spinning technique. In fact, it was even rare to find producers who knew how to spin with the Spanish style wheel. It was more common to simply purchase factory made acrylic yarn than to spin it oneself.



Figure 6.6 A “spindle” is collected from the sicsi plant to demonstrate a pre-Columbian spinning technique. [Author photo]



Figure 6.7 Elena demonstrates a pre-Columbian spinning technique using a sicsi spindle collected from the mountain behind her home. [Author photo]

Throughout the demonstration, Elena struggled because she was using cotton mixed with synthetic fibers, rather than pure cotton, and even had to tie the material onto her stick with a string so it would not fall off. The introduction of synthetic fibers makes the cotton less clingy, which makes it easier to work with when using a spinning wheel, but more difficult with this pre-Columbian spinning technique. Elena also found the process challenging because we harvested the sicsi “spindle” at the wrong time of the

year, so it was too dried out and more brittle. She emphasized that this spinning method only works with pure cotton wool and a fresh sicsi spindle. I would also guess that the demonstration was difficult because Elena rarely spins yarn anymore and without the repetition necessary for efficiency and comfort at a craft, she was out of practice.

The environmental impact of this pre-Columbian spinning technique is minimal. Sticks are harvested from plants that grow abundantly on the mountains surrounding villages. When they are too dried and brittle to be used for spindles, they can be burned for warmth or cooking, or discarded on the ground to decompose. The same goes for the longer stick/pole. This technique is quite different from how acrylic yarns are produced (discussed above), which have replaced the use of cotton for most producers.

As ideal as these materials and production techniques may seem from an ecological standpoint, they are simply not realistic for craft producers responding to global demands for cheaper products, brighter colors, and larger stock to choose from. Because of this, most producers have shifted their materials and production techniques. It was increasingly common for producers to use acrylic yarns and dyes and machined hand weaving. During my first research trip to Peguche in 2009, it was fairly rare for a family to have the wealth to own a machined loom. Those who did own machined looms often could not afford the maintenance to keep them running. When conducting research in 2018, one could not walk down a street in Peguche without hearing the telltale whir of machined hand weaving, and many households now possessed multiple machined looms. In fact, Emilia told me producers preferred to own more machined looms than they need to run in order to meet their production schedule, since maintenance requirements often take machines offline for days or weeks at a time.

Visiting different households in an extended family, I learned about the machined production of textiles. At the first house, I saw how brightly colored acrylic tablecloths were made via machined hand weaving, and at the second house, I saw how acrylic bags were made and embroidered. Pilar is a middle-aged indigenous woman who lives in Peguche in a small compound of buildings that house her nuclear family of procreation, her parents, a sister's nuclear family of procreation, another sister with mental disabilities, and several buildings solely used for craft production. At Pilar's, I saw how the brightly colored acrylic tablecloths were made via machined hand

weaving. While at their cluster of family houses, I realized how much space was required for this type of production to house the machines and for storage of raw materials as well as finished goods. I imagine that what one gains in time is offset in the money spent on space, supplies, electricity, and labor. Additionally, the owners of these machines/small-scale factories had a great deal invested in their methods of production, meaning they needed to sell many items in order to yield a return. These items were cheaper than handmade items, but that likely meant they needed to sell more items daily to cover their expenses.

Also, it was quite common for small-scale factory owners to only sell in the market on Wednesdays and Saturdays, allowing them to focus on production the other days of the week. While one could argue this is an efficient use of their time, it still only gives them two days per week to make sales necessary for economic returns. It would be easy to lose money by collecting a surplus of items based on constant production. This was why many producers sold to other local vendors; even if they did not sell to tourists daily, they still had an opportunity to make money. Additionally, while machinated production does not necessarily draw on historical production knowledge, it still required skill and some specialization to know how to use the machines (and, increasingly, computers) to create different designs. Young men seemed the most likely to fill these roles as semi-skilled laborers, while it was not uncommon for a middle-aged married couple to be the owners of the factory.

While the majority of vendors and producer-vendors with whom I spoke did not focus on the environmental impact of craft production or waste materials, one producer-vendor did note environmental concerns related to “modernization.” Discussing how her community and country has changed during her lifetime, Alicia said, “The world has not changed that much, but we are hurting the world more. For example, plastic is bad for the future ecologies. We are suffering as a result of modernization” [translated by author]. Alicia was referring to single use plastic bags that were used for food and for purchases in the Plaza de Ponchos, so while she did not focus on the materials and waste involved in craft production, she did note a concern about her community’s environmental impact.

In regard to materials and production techniques, there is always a tradeoff. Items that are handmade from start to finish demand a high price, and consumers willing to pay

it are becoming rarer and rarer. For better or for worse, global capitalism has created tourists who expect small, cheap items they can gift to the masses when they return home. They either do not recognize the time and talent that is required to produce a completely handmade item, or they do not care because it does not suit their desires. It is nearly impossible for producers to survive by making handmade items alone; they simply cannot compete with mechanized production that mass-produces items (both those made locally and those that are imported and resold in the Plaza de Ponchos) that can be sold much cheaper.

6.2.2 Craft Production and Distribution: The Tension between Authenticity and Innovation

When speaking with non-indigenous peoples (both locals and tourists), I learned about their perceptions and misunderstandings regarding craft production and distribution. Most notably, there was a shared concern regarding the authenticity of the Plaza de Ponchos market as an artisan market that many locals and tourists felt should only feature “authentic items,” which they defined as being handmade locally by indigenous Otavaleños. Although this belief was commonly held, it oversimplifies the history of the Plaza de Ponchos market which has changed over the years in terms of the kinds of goods being offered, the target audience, the layout, and the hours of operation. The shift from handmade handicraft production to more industrial production with marketing strategies targeting consumers was noted by Elsie Clews Parson in her famous ethnography the 1940s (Parsons 1945)! Hence, scholars, tourists, locals, and Otavaleños have been grappling with the tension between authenticity and innovation as it relates to Otavalan identity for decades. According to numerous interviews, the Plaza de Ponchos initially serviced mostly locals, and indigenous Otavaleños in particular, offering food goods and items like reed mats to be used around the home and indigenous clothing, including *alpargatas* and the famous blue ponchos worn by indigenous Otavalan men in traditional dress. These items were spread on cloths laid on the ground, as there were no concrete kiosks and vendors did not set up stalls or booths. The market also only operated in the early hours of the morning on weekends. This is obviously different from the market we see today, which has naturally shifted to accommodate more vendors and meet

changing consumer demands. The market no longer services indigenous locals, but instead targets foreign tourists. Thus, the issue of the authenticity of the market and the items it offers is directly contradicted by the history of the market as told by vendors whose families have been selling and purchasing items in the Plaza de Ponchos for generations.

Another major theme was the perceived “loss” of heritage in terms of local production knowledge because of the increasing number of imported goods being sold in the Plaza de Ponchos. This concern was held by indigenous and non-indigenous locals alike. The concern stemmed from the influx of cheap, imported goods being sold alongside locally produced goods and the ways in which those goods are marketed to consumers. When speaking to me or more knowledgeable consumers, vendors typically distinguished which items they (or a family member) had made with pride, often describing the production process in great detail, from those they had purchased, with an explanation that it was a matter of good business sense and economic survival. Vendors did not make these distinctions when addressing who they assumed to be less informed tourists, typically assessed by one’s level of fluency of the Spanish language. Unless pressed by customers, vendors were often ambiguous about the items they had purchased to resell and often obscured the exact origin of items, instead tracing their ‘origin’ to the vendor’s purchase from local wholesalers and middlemen, rather than acknowledging that these items were imported by noting the country of origin. Even when customers were aware that items were produced in Peru and then imported to be resold in Ecuador, it was common for vendors to try to dismiss the cultural difference between indigenous Peruvians and Ecuadorians or, alternatively, to argue that these particular goods in question were produced locally, unlike the seemingly identical goods that were produced in Peru. Thus, the types of goods being offered were shifting, but vendors continue to rely on the marketing strategies using narratives of personal/family/local production that have proven successful in the past, which could seem deceitful to more knowledgeable customers and led some locals to challenge the reputation and authenticity of the Plaza de Ponchos as a local artisan market.

Reactions to the perceived “loss” of heritage in terms of the goods being sold in the Plaza de Ponchos varied. Between 2014-2018 in the Otavalo area, there was a trend to

open a number of new combination workshop/museum/stores specializing in knowledge transmission of production techniques of “authentic” Otavalan crafts, which were also for sale to help fund these locations. Usually, middle-aged or older indigenous Otavalans founded these workshop/museum/stores in their small communities to serve as sites where producers who still knew older methods of production could practice these techniques while making a decent wage and also served to teach younger, interested indigenous producers these techniques so they would not die out. These sites were often described by those who owned and ran them as “living museums” [translated by author]. Craft producers also gave demonstrations to tourists for a fee, which covered some of the operating costs. One location even included a small bed and breakfast designed to amplify the experience for foreign tourists and to diversify their potential for income.

One of the co-owners of one of these sites explained they had founded Peguche Wasi because producing crafts is integral to their identity as indigenous Otavaleños and he feared many of the older production techniques were being lost as elder community members died. I can attest to this loss of production knowledge with the example described above: when I inquired about a pre-Columbian spinning technique, most producers were entirely unfamiliar with it, and they all directed me to a single woman, saying she was the only one in the surrounding communities who even had a chance of knowing the technique. When speaking to Peguche Wasi’s owner, he also told me that he dreamed of the site being a community center to bolster local traditions through gatherings, even as it simultaneously catered to foreigners intrigued by the demonstrations and craftsmanship of handmade items featured in a “living museum” [translated by author]. Their mission was to preserve these production techniques and transmit knowledge, while simultaneously preserving their way of life. He told me emphatically, “Nuestro trabajo es nestro vida” – “Our work is our life” [translated by author]. Reactions from indigenous Otavaleños who were not directly involved in these workshop/museum/stores vary. Some agreed with the stated missions that they were important for preserving and transmitting forms of knowledge that they felt were dying out. Others expressed concern over the competition these sites created among vendors and community members that might undermine social relations, especially as indigenous Otavalans faced increased competition from mestizo and Venezuelan refugee vendors.

Some also implied that these sites were too gimmicky, the prices too high, the customer demand too low, and the business model too unsustainable. It seemed as though the combination workshop/museum/stores were trying to accomplish a great deal as they catered to very different local and global needs and expectations. Time will tell what their impact will be on the preservation and transmission of knowledge of production techniques, as well as on the economic and cultural value of handmade crafts.

Non-indigenous local Ecuadorians were typically uninformed that such combination workshop/museum/stores exist. Their responses to the perceived “loss” of authenticity and heritage fell into one of two categories: 1.) indigenous Otavaleños should be admired for adapting to the changing demands of globalization while continuing to sell crafts and goods in a local market or 2.) indigenous Otavaleños represent an embarrassing loss of culture for the state as they increasingly shift from being craft producers to vendors of goods. The tension between these perspectives is best exemplified through the passionate conversation described below.

Anita is a mestiza woman from San Antonio de Ibarra, who I met because I had mentored her niece previously. Anita is a retired language arts high school teacher with an interest in local history and is well-known and well-liked in her community. She is well-educated and considers herself a scholarly woman, who enjoys surrounding herself with other well-educated and well-informed individuals. Anita has an active social calendar and typically meets three or four times each week with different groups of mestizo women for coffee and stimulating conversations on issues such as politics, religion, local gossip, international affairs, and current events. The women are friends who have met regularly for years, and as such, they are all comfortable voicing their often strongly held opinions, even when they clash. Despite passions occasionally flaring, there was always a lot of laughter, kindness, and, of course, food shared among the circles of women.

Because of my friendship with her niece, Anita adopted me as a surrogate niece and invited me to many events with her friends and family. Over the course of attending these events, I developed relationships with Anita’s friends and family and learned a great deal from the coffee circles. During one such meeting, the women asked what brought me to Ecuador. They grew excited when I described my research, especially at

the mention of Otavalan crafts and the Plaza de Ponchos market. They launched into a discussion about the authenticity and validity of the market, with Anita's friends Romina and Marisol dominating the conversation with their opposing stances. Marisol argued vehemently that it was a travesty that none of the items were from here [Ecuador] – according to her, they were all from Peru, Colombia, and China – and as such, it was an embarrassment to advertise the Plaza de Ponchos as a local artisan market. She was upset at the changes of the types of items in the market and the impact on the market's local and international prestige, as well as her belief that Otavalans were losing their culture and their heritage by no longer producing crafts and instead choosing to sell crafts made elsewhere.

Romina argued almost as vehemently that there was nothing wrong with the changes in the Plaza de Ponchos; it was simply a world market as the result of globalization. Speaking of globalization positively, she had no issue with the market changing and actually thought it was necessary for the survival of the market and the vendors who work there to adapt to global demands and become a world market. Romina also seemed to imply that if tourists were foolish or uninformed enough to think everything was locally produced and that resulted in sales, then so be it. She accepted that states are no longer isolated and felt it was perfectly acceptable to import and resell foreign goods. Her argument was that it would be impossible to remain isolated and insulated from the rest of the world because globalization has changed the whole world, and that trying to do so would be economically detrimental not just to the Plaza de Ponchos, but to all of Ecuador. Although not explicitly stated in this conversation, this was a criticism of some of former-President Rafael Correa's policies that limited trade with the U.S., which Romina had previously argued she felt had harmed Ecuador's economy (another controversial topic of debate).

Marisol then argued that the Plaza de Ponchos was not a global market because it had been and continues to be presented as a local artisan market. While she believed the market would be better ("better" because it would be more authentic and more economically prosperous) if it were truly an artisan market in practice and not merely in name, she was outraged that this artisan label was incongruous with the items for sale, nearly all of which were mass-produced and many of which were imported. She was also

appalled at how large the market had become and how many of the vendors had the exact same items for sale as so many other vendors. This sentiment had also been expressed to me by other locals and tourists, who often complained that the market was overwhelmingly large and who struggled to understand a market where seemingly every stall had the same items to offer, and where vendors often traded and borrowed from one another to meet a customer's demands. Some indigenous vendors even lamented the size of the market and similarity of items among vendors, but most explained it in terms of competition and economic necessity: if they specialized or only offer a limited selection of items, they were less likely to make a sale. Vendors would much rather lose a sale to a neighbor due to what they perceived as their own skill to close a sale than because they simply did not carry the item the customer wanted. These explanations did little to assuage folks like Marisol of their beliefs because their comments were more about the overall feeling and experience of shopping in the Plaza de Ponchos and were less concerned with the economic reality of the vendors who made it possible.

Throughout the conversation, Marisol seemed most concerned over the perception of the market, locals, and its reflection on the region, as well as the question: what does Ecuador have to offer if it loses its artisans, particularly its indigenous artisans? Linking artisan production/status with indigenous peoples, and utilizing the logic of many Latin American states that champion the indigenous groups within their borders as distinguishing them from their neighbors, she wondered: what will make Ecuador unique? And if Ecuador is not unique, what will this do to the tourism industry and the economy?

Here, Shlossberg would argue that without perceived rarity, artisan markets will struggle and possibly fail. Concepts of authenticity and value are dependent upon the market, and in particular, upon tourists' preferences as consumers (Shlossberg 2015:36). In their effort to buy "authentic" handicrafts, tourists rely on a false sense of rareness, something many indigenous vendors attempt to provide, while also offering a selection of goods they know their consumers expect (Shlossberg 2015:117).

With the nature of the Plaza de Ponchos called into question, one must consider market forces and the influence of tourists. Most tourists did not want a competitive free market where they can simply walk to the next stall for a better price. They wanted a

handcrafted item with a story, preferably made by the vendor or a relative, so they could take that item and its story home to show it off. Yet, paradoxically, they also wanted low prices, presumably because they undervalue artisanal labor. This paradox is precisely why many Otavalans have “chosen” – although I would argue it is a constrained choice – to sell imported goods. Many of the items they sold came from Peru and Colombia and at least appeared artisanal in nature (some of which are actually made by other indigenous groups), and thus, were easy to sell in a similar manner to previously-locally-produced handicrafts. Many of the items from China were either rather clearly trinkets that tourists could recognize as being imported but likely would not care because they can be purchased cheaply en masse for large groups of acquaintances at home (ex: class at school, church members, etc.), or they were sold wholesale to other vendors. Thus, although the conversation among Anita’s friends was stimulating and it reflected the ideas held by many mestizo Ecuadorians, it overlooked the current reality of vending in the Plaza de Ponchos and the constrained choices vendors must make in response to consumer demands as they strive for economic security.

6.2.3 Generational Aspirations

Many vendors’ children expressed little to no interest in pursuing a craft-based livelihood as adults. Several of them sulked when their mothers insisted they help sell items in the Plaza de Ponchos. Mothers often bribed their children with food or games/shows/music on their phones, thinking the exposure to vending and time together in the market will instill in their children a sense of hard work, valuable vending skills, and a relationship with crafts that has been historically important for so many Otavaleños. Yet, most Otavalan children were uninterested in learning vending strategies from their mothers, viewing this work more like chores that must be completed than as a potential future career. As such, the younger generation of vendors did not utilize the same vending strategies as their elder counterparts.

Many mothers struggled to encourage a relationship with crafts for their children, who often described the market as boring. Mothers offered their children incentives to spend time in the market. Many mothers allowed their children to watch games/shows/music on their phones, and rewarded children with food treats, like ice

cream or chips. Thus, children received more screen time and treats in the market than would be allowed at home, with mothers trying to reward children for spending time in the market and also using rewards to create a position association with the market and craft related work. Another strategy that families used was for children to be responsible for small items at the family's stall in the market. The children purchased the items, so they also received the profits from the items. Mothers were aware that the opportunity for children to earn their own money that they could spend as they desire provided an incentive for children to not only spend time in the market surrounded by crafts and by their elders who had established work lives based around crafts, but also provided an incentive for children to learn necessary vending strategies to make sales. This strategy attempted to instill an interest in crafts/vending among the younger generation interested through direct investment in specific items, which teaches responsibility.

Concepción used this strategy with her son, who was responsible for small items like bracelets and stone turtles. The family described him as a mischievous eleven-year-old, but he enjoyed spending time with his mother in the market and interacting with customers, far more than many of the other children I observed. He especially enjoyed listening to customers speak in English and attempting to follow their conversations. Despite his interest, he would grow bored quickly. "To keep him from causing trouble" [translated by author], Concepción allowed him to run errands, eat snacks, and use her phone to play games and watch videos. Concepción's extended kin uses a similar strategy. Her aunt Jazmin's three children are responsible for the shot glasses, dolls, and bracelets at the family's stall. Unfortunately, only Jazmin's youngest, her daughter Lisette, actually enjoyed selling items. Her eldest son openly said he hated it and had found employment as a mechanic; this kept him busy and allowed him to earn money without vending in the market. Her other son seems indifferent and spent little time in the market. Still in high school, he "has no idea" what he wants to do after graduation [translated by author]. Lisette liked vending in the market, according to the family and to Lisette. While she did interact with customers and grew excited when she made sales, she was eleven and spent much of her time in the market playing with friends rather than vending. Depending on her mood, she could be outgoing to engage with vendors, or so shy, she refused to speak with them at all. I observed moments when she appeared

excited to engage customers because it resulted in a sale, but in general, she seemed to enjoy being in the market because it was where her friends and mother were located, more than an interest in crafts or vending. Although her mother crocheted Aya Humas and other members of her family hand-embroider and bead items, Lisette never expressed an interest in learning to produce handmade portable crafts. She was only eleven when I was last in Otavalo, so she certainly has time to change interests and decide what she would like to pursue as a career. Yet, she provides an interesting foil to most Otavalan children, as one of the few children to express an interest in pursuing a craft-based livelihood.

One Saturday in August 2017, Lucia's oldest son, Javier, was uncharacteristically interested in talking to me. In his early twenties, he had previously been in school or with his father, so we had not developed the same kind of close relationship I have with his older sisters Karla and Paula. Javier asked me a flurry of questions about life in the U.S. and how much things cost there. He explained, "I want to visit [the U.S.] to buy clothes and electronics, especially an iPhone" [translated by author]. He had never visited the U.S. but said "I will once I'm a millionaire! Then, I can go all the time. I'll know it well!" [translated by author].

After graduating from high school, Javier spent time selling handicrafts in Colombia with his sister Karla and her husband. Javier told me, "It was a bit dangerous and crowded there, but it was a good experience. I wouldn't mind returning [to vend] someday" [translated by author]. He returned to Otavalo because he wants to "dedicate myself to my studies," but first, he wants to spend 1-2 years "helping the family and dedicating myself to God" [translated by author]. He felt badly while he was vending in Colombia because his mom missed him, and he thought she did not have enough help without him. His father worked another job, so he did not spend much time in the market, and his two younger siblings were still in school. Although they spend time with their mother in the market, they did not provide much help. His older sisters were married and had their own stalls, so they longer helped their mother.

Despite his commitment to spend a few years vending in the market and his willingness to vend in foreign markets, Javier desired a career outside of crafts. Ultimately, he wanted to go to college to become a doctor, first studying general

medicine and then surgery. He said, “Ecuador has a big problem because there aren’t enough doctors, and a lot of the ones we have aren’t any good. You have to wait forever [to get an appointment], and then they charge so much! It’s not right” [translated by author]. Javier described the situation as high demand for health care professionals with low supply of quality doctors. Because of this, he felt doctors could overcharge their patients, which was concerning to him: “It’s not good. They’re supposed to help people. Yes, they make money, but it’s not just that” [translated by author]. He seemed determined to pursue this career, but also saw the 5-6 more years of school as a bit daunting, which may be part of the reason he was happy to dedicate himself to crafts for a few years. He felt that doctors provide an essential service for the country, with the implication being that crafts are not essential. As indicated in the previous comment, the steady, high income associated with the profession was a draw, but Javier described his career aspiration predominantly through the lens of stability that contrasts with a craft-based livelihood: “I want a 9-5 job, where I work inside. I don’t have to worry if it rains unexpectedly. I won’t get wet or sick from it. I won’t have to work on the weekends, and my evenings will be mine. I won’t have to worry, ‘will I get paid today?’ No, that’ll be guaranteed. I do my work, then I get paid. Simple” [translated by author]. Notice that every characteristic he described as the desired reason for working as a doctor in the future contrasts with working as a craft vendor. He wanted a regular schedule working indoors, rather than 13+ hour workdays in an outdoor open-air market; he wanted a guaranteed salary, rather than income dependent on the day’s sales. For him, the healthcare profession embodied both stability and success, while craft work embodied instability and insecurity. Despite seeming to enjoy vending and being described by other vendors as a good vendor and a good worker, he could not envision a lifetime based on a craft-based livelihood. Rather, he saw working in the market as a steppingstone to earn money that would allow him to go to college.

When I returned to Ecuador in 2018, Lucia and Karla often told me with great pride “Javier is going to be a doctor” [translated by author]. He split his time between vending in the market and taking preparatory courses at a pre-university (similar to a community college in the U.S.). Javier was hoping to attend college starting in 2019, to officially begin his studies to be a doctor. I had little opportunity to speak with him

because of his studies, but his mother and sister did not know which university he wanted to attend. Unfortunately, he has not stayed in touch, so I do not know where he currently is in his career/education, although his choice to pursue medicine would be even more relevant as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Javier provides a poignant example of someone who appeared successful at vending crafts, yet ultimately sought another livelihood he perceived to be more stable and successful.

It was more common that those among the younger generation of vendors had no interest in a craft-based livelihood in the future. Some of Alicia's younger extended kin, Erika and Oscar, helped vend at her stall, especially on Saturdays, when she rented two separate vending locations. Erika studied at a university and her younger cousin Oscar was still in high school; both helped Alicia vend on Saturdays. Because he was still in high school, Oscar did not have a clear picture of his career aspirations, but he did not see a future for himself in crafts. Neither Erika nor Oscar had an interest in producing crafts, even though Alicia works with a network of women to make white cotton hand-embroidered aprons. Neither Erika nor Oscar could weave on a loom and neither cared to learn how to. Erika said, "I learned to make crafts by hand in school because they made us. I didn't have a choice. From second grade to seventh grade, they made us learn how to embroider by hand and sew and crochet. I don't know why we had to learn these crafts, but I didn't enjoy it. It seemed like a waste of time" [translated by author]. Although she did not see a value in learning crafting skills, Erika put her sewing skills to work to make costume pieces that she and Alicia sell to locals around Christmas. Erika explained her feelings by saying, "It's not too bad because it gives me something to do [while in the market], so it's not so boring. And it's only once a year, thank God. But I also kinda hate it. I don't want to sew for a living. It takes forever, and there's no money in it" [translated by author]. Because her studies limited her production time, she began sewing pieces in July or August, so I found it interesting that she framed this work as "only once a year." Further, her comments highlighted a broader struggle to find a passion that can be leveraged into a career. At the time, Erika studied finance at the university, but she told me, "Actually, I don't really like it [finance]. But then, I look at other topics [majors], and I don't really like any of those other options, either. And if I changed [majors], that would mean more time taking more classes. As it is, I'll graduate

soon. And at least finance will get me a good job then” [translated by author]. Erika’s real passion seemed to lie in fashion. She enjoyed discussing clothing and makeup trends with me and would often comment on my fair skin and naturally light hair (by Otavalan standards, my brown hair was considered “blonde” compared to their black hair). She dyed her hair to lighten it, and had it cut and styled to resemble a Western hairstyle. In the market, she never dressed *de anaco*, but would instead wear a full face of makeup and lightened her skin, with fashionable outfits that often left her uncomfortable due to the weather. One day, she wrapped herself in a thick shawl as she shivered and complained about the weather, so I asked about her outfit. She replied, “I don’t need to look like them [gesturing to older female vendors dressed *de anaco*]. I’d rather dress how I want and freeze [than dress *de anaco*]. I’m here [vending] because I have to be [to fulfill familial obligations. But this is not going to be my life” [translated by author]. Her comment was made with no malice, and it was not said in a resentful tone, but for her, it was a matter of fact that her image and identity was distinctive from the indigenous female vendors around her. Erika actively rejected the physical markers of indigeneity, as well as a crafting lifestyle. While she admitted she had no interest in finance, she saw this career path as one of stability that would provide the lifestyle that she wanted and would allow her to be in control of her image.

Thus, what the younger generation said they wanted to do and how they wanted to live differs from previous generations of Otavalans. Most older Otavalans expressed mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, they were excited to live at a time where there were more opportunities for indigenous peoples, and they wanted their younger relatives to select careers they would find fulfilling and rewarding. On the other hand, they saw the future for Otavalan communities as tied to crafts, so there was uncertainty of what the future would hold. Many adult vendors have already experienced some shifts in Otavalan relationships to crafts. Unlike previous generations, many older adults became vendors rather than producers. Family dynamics like socioeconomic status and birth order were largely significant in shaping one’s relationship to crafts. Still, many older vendors learned what they knew about crafts from watching their older relatives and former employers. They were aware that how they learned about crafts was no longer being replicated with younger generations, who spent more time in school and less time

working with crafts and expressed little interest in learning about producing or vending crafts. This begs the question: If there is a generational gap in craft producers and vendors, as the younger generation shifts to pursue other careers, who will teach future generation(s) this knowledge? Despite the nearly universal sentiment expressed by Otavalans with whom I interacted about the future being craft-based, generational aspirations as well as world events highlight that future livelihoods for Otavalans are uncertain.

6.3 Inter-Ethnic Relations and Power

6.3.1 Venezuelan Refugee Crisis and the Influx of Informal Vendors

During my research in 2018, I saw firsthand how the political-economic crisis in Venezuela had resulted in a humanitarian crisis in Ecuador, with several provinces declaring a state of emergency as they tried to cope with the thousands of Venezuelans crossing the border daily. Like US citizens' responses to immigrants – especially those from Latin America – Ecuadorian citizens' responses ranged from the desire to help Venezuelans to concern about how the country could accommodate the numbers to outrage at foreigners “stealing their jobs.” Venezuelan refugees were an incredibly vulnerable population who had turned to informal vending in Ecuador in an effort to survive, while they stilled in hopes the political-economic crisis in Venezuela would be resolved so they could return home to their lives and livelihoods.

It was common to see Venezuelan refugees on the streets, as they searched for work and housing, as they sold items, and where many of them had taken to living because no other housing arrangements could be made. Venezuelans had made use of public space throughout Ecuador to live, work, and socialize because they had virtually no access to private space. The bus terminals in Quito had become massive homeless camps, as many Venezuelan refugees exhausted all of their resources fleeing home, and by the time they reached Quito, they had nothing left. People in these camps helped each other, and some Quiteños provided small amounts of aid/donations in the form of food and blankets. Because the bus terminals were frequented by so many locals and people traveling throughout Ecuador, Venezuelans had a large population from whom they could

beg for change, food, work, or housing. Many Ecuadorians also warned me that thefts and crimes have been on the rise because of the influx of desperate Venezuelans. I did not personally witness any thefts or crimes, but this was a repeated story about the new immigrants.



Figure 6.8 A Venezuelan man on the street in Quito. Sign reads: Soy Venezolano en busca de un trabajo. Para poder sobrevivir. Ayudame con lo que [pueda?] de su corazón [Dios le bendiga (Difficult to see, but this is a likely phrase)] / Translation: I am Venezuelan, in search of work in order to survive. Help me with what [you can] out of [the goodness of] your heart. [God bless you] [Author photo. Translated by author]

In addition to seeing Venezuelan refugees living on the streets and holding signs in search of work (See Figure 6.8), it was incredibly common to see Venezuelan refugees selling whatever small items they could manage on buses and at street corners. Most commonly, they sold candy, cleaning products, bracelets, or other small crafts. On nearly every bus I rode, I encountered Venezuelans selling goods (usually chocolates/candies) and gifting their virtually worthless currency with every purchase. Typically, these informal vendors gave speeches about their circumstances, often apologizing for their presence and the political-economic crisis in Venezuela that brought them to such desperate measures. These speeches also served to drum up business from sympathetic listeners, as they usually included a description of the refugee's life and skills in Venezuela, starkly contrasted with their current desperate situation. Watching these

performances, I could only imagine how humbling and embarrassing it must be to ride various buses all day, giving speeches with intimate details of one's life, in hopes that people would take pity and purchase small goods for a small fee. This was certainly not an economically sustainable strategy, yet it was commonly employed by Venezuelan refugees out of desperation. Some local bus riders expressed disgust that they could not ride without encountering Venezuelan vendors, which surprised me given how common it was for people to sell small items on buses in Ecuador. Some bus riders purchased items or made donations; some even offered kind words and prayers for the Venezuelans. Most, however, simply ignored the Venezuelans like they did other informal vendors on buses.

One Wednesday in August 2017, I was visiting with Andrea and her neighbors, including Pilar and her family, in the Otavalan market. Andrea's stall was located near one of the corners of the Plaza de Ponchos, providing us with a clear view of two of the surrounding streets. It was a slow day in the market, so we were discussing consumer trends. Suddenly, the police swarmed a small group of informal mestizo vendors, who had been selling shoes on tarps in front of stores opposite the Plaza de Ponchos. The situation appeared casual, as the police spoke with the mestizo vendors, who packed up their items and left with the police officers in the police vehicles. There was an absence of noise – there was no shouting or use of sirens – but the entire interaction lasted only a few minutes. My vendor friends in the Plaza de Ponchos remained calm and remarked “what a shame” it was [translated by author]. I was quite alarmed and asked my friends to explain the situation, also seeking understanding of their attitude toward the incident. Andrea responded, “I don't really know, but I'm sure they'll be fine” [translated by author]. Andrea's faith often prevented her from becoming alarmed or upset by negative situations. Pilar then explained, “Of course, we don't know the exact situation, but they probably didn't have a license to vend there. They aren't supposed to vend there during the week [outside of Saturdays]” [translated by author]. This surprised me, as that section of the street almost always housed vendors selling Western style items. Pilar continued to reassure me, with her relatives offering affirmative comments: “They'll go with the police because they have to pay a fine. But it's not too bad. It'll be ok! They'll probably be back today or tomorrow” [translated by author]. Her sister chimed in, saying, “They'd

wait a few days, if they were smart. Otherwise, the police will just come back, and they'll pay more. But it happens. They'll be ok!" [translated by author]. While my friends did their best to reassure me at the time, I have since thought about this incident in light of the Venezuelan refugee crisis that has brought an influx of mestizos to the Ecuadorian informal market sector. Venezuelan refugees were not likely to be vending on the streets with the appropriate licenses. For them, encounters with the police could have more severe consequences than a fine, and could result in deportation. While I never witnessed any other incidents that involved the police, I have often wondered about their relationship with Venezuelan refugees in the informal market sector.

The warnings I received from countless Ecuadorians to take care against increased theft rates because of the influx of Venezuelan refugees connected with their remarks on the competition Venezuelans placed on vendors selling trinkets. Many Ecuadorian vendors were concerned with the presence of Venezuelans on street corners because it made them and their customers uncomfortable. Although many American and European tourists could likely not tell the difference between mestizo Ecuadorians and Venezuelans, they did notice the number of people filling every street corner. Tourists often lamented the number of people attempting to sell them something everywhere they went, noting that it made them uncomfortable. Tourists felt fatigued from constant requests to purchase items and noted it made them less likely to purchase items. Although Venezuelans typically occupied informal markets on street corners and buses, they still posed a perceived threat to indigenous vendors in more established markets like the Plaza de Ponchos by inundating the market with small, cheap trinkets, and creating fatigued consumers less likely to purchase items. It was also possible that customers who understood the situation would take pity on Venezuelans and opt to purchase items from them given their circumstances, thus cutting into sales indigenous vendors would expect to make. Research on this is not yet available, but people's perceptions and reactions are still telling in predicting a decline in inter-ethnic social relations as indigenous and mestizo Ecuadorians increasingly view Venezuelan refugees as competitors and a threat to their way of life.

6.3.2 Mestizo Artisans: “Eco-Friendly Entrepreneurs”

Unlike indigenous artisans who are expected to be stewards of nature because of stereotypes that link indigenous peoples to the land, mestizo artisans are expected to exploit whatever resources are at their disposal as they fully engage with global capitalism. Any artisans who challenge these expectations immediately receive attention from tourists and local consumers. Some mestizo artisans had begun creating recycled and/or eco-friendly art that mainly catered to tourists from the U.S. and Europe who care about the environment and will spend more money for goods with labels like “ethically sourced” or “recycled.” These mestizo artisans were seen as innovators concerned by the impact of craft production on the environment and had earned the reputation of guardians of nature. Unlike indigenous populations who are expected to be stewards of nature and are villainized if they ‘fail’ in this role, mestizos who make conservation efforts were seen as eco-saviors, who benefited both socially and economically.

6.3.2.1 Materials and Waste

Recycled materials were becoming increasingly popular for use in mestizo artisans’ jewelry designs, which look very different from the jewelry produced and sold by indigenous vendors. In a market where virtually every indigenous vendor’s stall offers nearly identical items to its neighbors, mestizo artisans selling recycled goods stood out and often drew crowds of onlookers and customers. Many of these mestizo vendors had signage to indicate their use of recycled materials, so even tourists with little understanding of Spanish were aware that the items are unique. For tourists and locals who were fluent in Spanish, mestizo vendors described their selection process for materials and how they upcycled them into jewelry.

Recycling materials obviously has a positive environmental impact because it prevents those materials from ending up in landfills or oceans. It also does not require mining to yield more raw materials. The production techniques used to recycle and upcycle the materials into jewelry is environmentally friendly because they are low energy and because artisans typically produce a smaller number of items which are easy to transport by foot when packed into a bag.

Another eco-friendly craft made by mestizo artisans were notebooks with paper made from sugar cane waste. These notebooks were stunningly simple, but they held appeal to tourists because they were small, lightweight, and perfect for creating a travel journal or gifting to friends for the popular trend of bullet journaling. Tourists were also drawn to them because the recycled paper gave the pages an interesting texture and softer hue than bright white notebook paper, which created a rustic feel. The artisan touch was in the details: the notebooks were bound with lacing and the covers were decorated with pyrography wood burning. Mestizo artisans created a plethora of wood burned designs, ranging from geometric motifs to mandalas and mudras to animals to famous people, like Frida Kahlo and Che Guevara. The artists also did custom designs. Because pyrography pens are small, lightweight, and mobile, mestizo artisans would often decorate the covers of notebooks while vending on the streets surrounding the Plaza de Ponchos. These demonstrations often drew crowds, who remarked on the skill of artisans creating wood burned designs before their eyes.

Although the recycled notebooks are beautiful and seem incredibly eco-friendly because they recycle agricultural waste, their actual economic impact is probably quite low. Recycling sugar cane waste into paper is environmentally friendly, but the alternative of dumping sugar cane waste is not really harmful because it will decompose. In fact, the energy used to create the recycled paper may offset any potential positive impact the product has. Additionally, these notebooks only come in one size (standard journal size) and do not hold much paper, so they may encourage consumers to purchase more paper goods. Given that only two vendors in Otavalo offer these notebooks, they realistically did not have much positive or negative environmental impact.

Because of the scale of production and distribution, this new trend of mestizo-produced recycled and/or eco-friendly art realistically does not have a huge positive environmental impact. It is likely a fad that caters to the growing number of environmentally concerned tourists, whose carbon footprint in traveling from Europe and the U.S. to Ecuador is likely not even offset by their purchase of recycled and/or eco-friendly art. Still, it is an interesting trend that might signal a shift to more sustainable materials and production techniques for mestizo and indigenous producers alike as the

number of consumers worldwide concerned with the environmental impact of the goods they consume and discard seems to be increasing.

6.3.2.2 Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Status

I argue that perceptions about indigenous peoples' relationship to nature and craft production is more about power and social status than about environmental stewardship. Despite strong indigenous movements in Ecuador, whiteness is still desired and rewarded. The Plaza de Ponchos has long been considered an artisan market, but indigenous vendors and local mestizos have told me that is no longer true due to all of the imported goods, with mixed reactions and the reasons for this shift discussed in detail above. The change in the nature of the Plaza de Ponchos and the items it offers has opened a space for mestizo artisans and vendors, many of whom travel from Argentina – and now Venezuela – in hopes of finding a highly frequented market. In a traditionally indigenous populated space, whiteness and mestizaje was once again being prioritized and rewarded as innovative and eco-friendly, while indigenous production and distribution strategies were viewed as disappointing when they failed to meet stereotypes about both the people and their production techniques being unchanging and tied to the land.

This further disadvantages indigenous women, who are perceived as “more Indian” (de la Cadena 1995) and therefore expected to continue ‘traditions,’ meaning they are expected to represent pre-Colombian life in food, clothing, cultural beliefs, and forms of knowledge. There was pressure for Otavalan women to uphold these stereotypes at the expense of changing. Indigenous women may feel additional pressures to commodify their ethnicity, which has the potential to reinforce or transform gender relations. In many cases, indigeneity is linked with perceived authenticity, simplicity, and tradition; tourists expect native people to be static and unchanging, and indigenous groups often adopt these types of narratives when describing the production of crafts in order to make a sale (Stephen 2005:31; Wood 2008; Meisch 2002; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Berlo and Phillips 1998; Brown 2004).

6.4 Conclusions

As this chapter has demonstrated, what is being commodified for tourists is shifting. As new immigrants enter the informal market sector in Otavalo and as tourists' expectations about authenticity and sustainability become more salient in their demands, it raises questions for the future of Otavalan crafts and the co-use of market space. Will the influx of Venezuelan refugees as vendors further marginalize indigenous women? Will Otavalan women need to develop a new strategy of representation and vending strategies in the market? Future examination of inter-ethnic relations regarding the environmental and social impact of craft production and distribution is needed.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Contributions of this Research

This research has the potential to impact economic and development policies by providing a better understanding of how indigenous peoples produce crafts, and how that can be used to understand development from below. Hopefully, the findings from this research could be applied elsewhere for empowerment by using Otavalans as a model of development from below to overcome inequality. Otavalans provide a unique case of an economy controlled by indigenous people. As such, it is important to learn their strategies and assess whether they can be generalized and implemented elsewhere. This is especially pertinent in locations where neoliberal policies have been implemented, and the state has abandoned many projects aimed at meeting basic needs. This research studies a case in which indigenous people have developed their own strategies for economic survival and success, which may be shifting due to global pressures.

This research can also impact discussions about the valorization of crafts and relationship of producers and vendors to crafts. Tourist consumers from foreign cultures likely have different systems of valorization for the crafts they purchase in a tourist market when compared to local or indigenous producers and vendors. It is important to understand how local and indigenous producers and vendors navigate these various systems of valorization and meaning. Further, Otavalans describe their relationship to crafts in a more holistic approach than is often reflected in the literature. We can better understand how they describe their identity and relationship to crafts, especially as we analyze how some groups are marginalized by their various identities.

7.2 Summary of Main Findings

In this study of Otavalan crafts, perspectives about different weaving technologies highlight the hierarchy of Otavalan crafts that places weaving textiles at the top, as the most well-known, the most respected, and the most ‘authentic.’ This actively erases women’s craft contributions, both locally among Otavalans and as crafting is described in the literature. I have argued that women’s contributions to craft production and vending are vital for Otavalan livelihoods, and that these contributions should not be invisibilized.

Additionally, most Otavalans described their relationship to crafts in a holistic manner that includes both production and vending. Much of the literature separates these as distinct identities and spotlights production, at the expense of acknowledging women's market experience and vending knowledge. I have tried to counteract that by spotlighting Otavalan women's market days, which I experienced firsthand.

One of the ways in which I attempted to learn more about Otavalans' relationships with crafts was through a modified photovoice methodology. Because I studied crafts, which I consider to be a visual artform of material culture, I felt it was important to use photos as a storytelling device. However, I wanted to represent the perspective of others through photos, and not just my own vantage point; I felt a participatory photography research method would allow me to incorporate the perspectives of my interlocutors as they interacted with material culture. Although I instructed participants to photograph craft production and vending specifically, I also asked them to photograph anything they felt was important. Some participants only took a few photos, aiming for the perfect shots of craft production or vending. However, most participants took photos of their homelife, showing them cooking with family members and preparing for celebrations. There were also photos of public life, showing participants attending church services and community events. Although my close relationship with my research interlocutors allowed me great access to daily life, their photos also captured moments from which I was absent and demonstrated the significance of social relationships in their lives and work. As we talked about the photos my collaborators took, I learned more about those relationships and how participation in community celebrations and events also contributed to their craft networks. Changes that have come with conversion to Evangelical Protestantism for some community members have meant changes in the way that collective community Catholic celebrations have mapped onto social networks that people rely on in crafts production. Thus, through the use of this methodology I gained a more holistic perspective of Otavalan social life and some of the changes in the broader social context that affects crafts production and vending. Although I gave a focused prompt for my research, it would be rewarding to use participatory photography in future research to allow my interlocutors to convey what they feel is most important. In the future, I would likely ask them to use their own

smartphones, as most have phones and are familiar with taking photographs with them, and that might encourage broader participation and be less cumbersome than handing out the digital camera I used for this project.

I initially set out to study how women were involved in weaving the textiles for which Otavalans have long been famous. Yet, I increasingly found myself spending time at the market, as the local preference was for women to serve as vendors. While in the market, I saw how important it was for Otavalan women to perform their identity as indigenous women, and while these were personal decisions, they were on public display. The U.S. has not always had positive interactions with Ecuador, and indigenous Ecuadorians have been mistreated by foreigners in the past. Yet, I found myself welcomed into the communities and homes where I studied, and was given gifts not only for myself, but also for my family in Pennsylvania, whom the vendors in Ecuador had never met. When Ecuador's immigration rules changed, I had to personally navigate the visa application process while also conducting fieldwork. I spent months uncertain of when I would have to leave the country, when I would be able to return, how I would complete my research, how I would complete my degree, and what all of that meant financially and for my career. My indigenous friends consoled me and gave me food treats, while saying they wished they could do more. My mestizo friends gave me rides, stood with me in line, and helped me navigate the agonizing process. Through this experience, I gained a deeper appreciation for immigration experiences, fully aware that my identity as a white American afforded me with privileges most will never experience. As a result of my personal visa experiences, I met Venezuelan refugees and became increasingly aware of dynamic inter-ethnic relations and power dynamics at play in Ecuador, especially in the use of public space and the informal market sector. Thus, the act of living in Otavalo and conducting fieldwork not only shaped my research and this dissertation, but it also shaped me through all of these experiences and so many others that do not fit on a page.

One of my clear findings from my time in Otavalo is that the indigenous women I talked with were aware of and actively strategizing about the commodification of their identity. I had not anticipated that level of awareness prior to my research. Because women are perceived as "more Indian" (de la Cadena 1995), the pressure for Otavalan

women to be publicly visible vessels of indigeneity is poignantly felt and navigated by the women with whom I interacted, as they dressed *de anaco* and produced portable handmade crafts in the market where they work as vendors. The market also provides vendors with a public space where they are valorized for their femininity and indigeneity, which is further promoted by tourist agencies and the state, despite the same indigenous women experiencing sexism and racism in their lived experiences. Still, the market provides opportunities for vendors to establish important social relationships and reaffirm what it means to be *indígena* Kichwa Otavaleños. Their actions and our conversations highlight their agency in how they address the commodification of their identity as indigenous Otavalan women, the pressures they feel to conform and how they strategically employ their identity in the marketplace for economic gain.

Otavaleños are involved in global circulations and must navigate the tension between innovation, which often arises from adapting to consumer demand, and the pressure to uphold a narrowly envisioned form of authenticity and indigeneity. The Otavalans with whom I interacted envisioned and defined authenticity differently than the narrow conception of ‘authenticity’ as unchanging people/beliefs/practices/technology that others might thrust on them. Because their livelihood is connected to ‘authentic’ craft work, the Otavalans I interviewed prioritized the sales of their work, rather than certain production techniques, designs, or colors. They deftly navigated tradition and modernity in their daily lives. Otavalans have responded to increased demand by importing goods to be sold alongside locally produced goods, shifting the nature of the Plaza de Ponchos market. To cater to different types of consumers, some Otavalans have continued to handmake items to be sold at local boutiques or combination workshop/museum/store spaces. For other Otavalans, notions of artisanal expertise and what constitutes work are changing with technologies and material supply chains related to crafts production. This was highlighted in interview responses from Concepción and Isabel detailed above, which exemplify a perspective I heard many Otavalans express: “work” involves the active use of one’s body, like setting up a stall in a market or handweaving items on a floor loom. It will be interesting to see how perspectives about work may shift in the future, with the increase in machinated hand weaving and imported goods, signaling a shift in production technologies and in labor tasks.

Another key finding from my research is about global circulations. In the past, indigenous Otavalan vendors dominated the market space. It was not uncommon for crafts from throughout Latin America to migrate through exchange networks to be resold by Otavalans in the Plaza de Ponchos (for example, see Kyle 2000). What I observed, however, was a shift in this vending pattern. Instead of Otavalans selling everything, I saw and increase in mestizo vendors from many countries who were bringing both their crafts and their expertise directly to the market. This may indicate a decline in the mobility of Otavalan transnational vending networks or an increase in other Latin Americans' mobility. Regardless of the cause, the result is that Otavalans no longer own this public space. For some Otavalans, this feels like one of many ongoing challenges they must continue to navigate.

7.3 Ongoing Challenges

In recent years, Otavalans have navigated shifting global circulations, which have impacted the informal market sector in Ecuador and abroad. Otavalans have been forced to navigate ongoing challenges that impact their livelihoods, like the Venezuelan refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, global climate change, and changing generational aspirations.

During my research in 2018, I saw firsthand how the political-economic crisis in Venezuela resulted in a humanitarian crisis in Ecuador, with several provinces declaring a state of emergency as they tried to cope with the influx of Venezuelans crossing the border. Venezuelans made use of public space throughout Ecuador to live, work, and socialize because they had virtually no access to private space. People's perceptions and reactions varied, but they were telling in predicting a decline in inter-ethnic social relations as indigenous and mestizo Ecuadorians increasingly viewed Venezuelan refugees as competitors and a threat to their way of life. Shortly after navigating the Venezuelan refugee crisis, Ecuador was hit by another global crisis that altered the use of public space and every other aspect of life.

Like the rest of the world, life in Ecuador was altered by the COVID-19 pandemic. On Saturday, March 14, 2020, Ecuador announced that it would close its borders to foreign travelers on March 16, 2020. Although Ecuador took swift action in

the hopes of mitigating the spread of the novel coronavirus, the country was devastated by the disease. Ecuador had one of the highest rates of infections and deaths around the world. The numbers are staggering: “Officially, more than thirty-five thousand Ecuadorians died of COVID-19 in the past two years, but the total excess deaths for 2020 and 2021 number more than eighty thousand” (Alarcón 2022). To date, Imbabura province has over 15,000 reported cases and 424 deaths, but those numbers are likely understated, as frequently occurs with COVID-19 reporting (Imbabura). The large coastal city of Guayaquil was especially hard hit, and international news stories soon emerged about dead bodies piling up in the street, as an already understaffed healthcare system was overwhelmed. A March 7, 2022, *New Yorker* article titled “A Pandemic Tragedy in Guayaquil: How Ecuador’s largest city endured one of the world’s most lethal outbreaks of COVID-19” summarizes the pandemic’s impact over the past two years as “an ongoing narrative of disaster” (Alarcón 2022). Ecuador set an aggressive goal to vaccinate nine million people in one hundred days, which was accomplished in September 2021. This began the process of restarting public life after a series of curfews and lockdowns, prompting the World Bank to write an article titled “Ecuador, the Country that Vanquished the Nightmare Pandemic in 100 Days” (2021). Yet, as recently as March 28, 2022, the U.S. State Department issued a travel advisory, warning Americans to “reconsider” travel to Ecuador: “Reconsider travel to Ecuador due to COVID-19. Exercise increased caution in Ecuador due to crime” (Ecuador Travel Advisory 2022). Although no Andean location is specified in the advisory, travel from the U.S. to Ecuador is still discouraged.

For Otavalan vendors in a tourist market, no visitors meant no sales, which meant no income. Some vendors traveled to Quito, hoping that vending would continue in the capital city. Some Otavalan vendors leveraged their vending skills to sell food like fruits and vegetables in the informal market. Others heeded warnings to stay home, hoping to wait until circumstances returned to normal. Otavalan vendors I know have remained positive but vague about their circumstances during our conversations, which is not surprising, as the cultural preference is to only discuss personal matters in person. One mestizo friend told me that walking through Otavalo felt strange during the pandemic: “The market is empty. There’s no one. It’s so strange. Instead, there’s fruit for sale on

every corner. On every corner! Because what else can they do?! It's either that or stay home" [translated by author].

Because the Plaza de Ponchos is an outdoor, open-air market, vendors are acutely attuned to daily weather and general climate trends. For those who work outside, altered weather patterns impact one's working environment and comfort level. As described above, the weather is a major factor in how vendors set up the items on display and protect them from the elements. Inclement weather might drive tourists out of the market or drive vendors to the comfort of their homes, or it might provide vendors with opportunities to make specialized sales. As global climate change continues, it will continue to provide challenges for Otavalan vendors.

Many vendors' children expressed little to no interest in pursuing a craft-based livelihood as adults. Although some youth demonstrate vending skills, it is more common that those among the younger generation of vendors have no interest in a craft-based livelihood in the future. Thus, what the younger generation says they want to do and how they want to live differs from previous generations of Otavalans. With this generational change in aspirations, will it result in a generational change in livelihoods? If so, what will future Otavalan relationships with crafts look like?

Otavalans do not navigate these challenges alone. Ecuador has a long history of a strong indigenous movement that amplifies the voices and concerns of indigenous peoples on local and state levels. The relationship between the indigenous movement and the state was described in more detail above, but it is currently a somewhat strained relationship that will remain influential in shaping Otavalans' lives in the future. The Ecuadorian state 'gives' rights to indigenous peoples, but in the process, it makes the concept of indigeneity static. The Ecuadorian state supports crafts by promoting tourism to the Andes, using images of crafts and Otavalan people, yet it does so through the lens of presenting Otavalans as unchanging relics and "model Indians." The state relies on indigenous peoples to attract international tourists but simultaneously ignores and attempts to erase the agency of indigenous peoples (Martínez Novo 2021). What stance will the future state take regarding indigenous peoples, and how will that be implemented through policies that impact daily life?

So, what does the future hold for Otavalans? Perhaps we can revisit an earlier ethnographic interview response to draw inspiration from Félix's vision of Otavalans' future relationship to crafts:

Production will be advancing [through increased mechanization]. It would be good to maintain a place that conserves the production of *artesanías*, but we need federal support to not lose that [knowledge of manual production techniques], while still commercializing to survive and be competitive. We don't need a museum, but a workshop. [Translated by author].

While his entire response paints a picture for the future Félix envisions for Otavalans' relationship to crafts, it is the last sentence I want to spotlight: "We don't need a museum, but a workshop" [translated by author]. The emphasis is on ongoing action, rather than historical knowledge preservation. Otavalans are not unchanging relics or "model Indians" whose lifestyle can be portrayed in a museum's ethnographic vignette; rather, they are a living, breathing culture, who will continue to respond to and influence the global circulations to which they belong. Otavalans will continue to adapt and innovate, even as they navigate stereotyped ideas about who they *should* be. Ultimately, they will actively shape their own future, as they continue to redefine what it means to be *indígena* Kichwa Otavaleños known around the world for crafts sold in the local market.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

I conducted semi-structured ethnographic interviews, which allowed me to ask general questions in order to obtain data on similar topics that were later analyzed for overlap in order to determine what ideas and practices may or may not be representative of Otavalan craft producers. Interview questions are themed around topics of craft production; materials and style; market knowledge; and identity.

In English:

Craft Production:

1. Do you weave? Crochet? Knit? Embroider? Bead? Make other crafts?
2. Where do you normally make these items (market, home, factory)?
3. If they have a factory: How many people work in your factory? How many are family members and non-family members?
4. When did you start?
5. Who taught you?
6. Was it your choice to learn?
7. Have you ever taught anyone else?
8. Who else in your family makes crafts?
9. Are there certain jobs in the production that are for women or men only? Why?
10. What happens if women do “men’s work”? Or if men do “women’s work”?
11. Do any jobs depend on age? If so, why?
12. Have you ever been called a good woman/man because you can make _____ or a bad woman/man because you can’t make _____?

Materials & Style:

1. Where do you get most of your materials from?
2. Do you spin or dye your own yarn?
3. What are the most important factors in obtaining materials?
4. How do you decide colors and designs?
5. Do you ever take orders for specific patterns / colors?

Market Knowledge:

1. Who in your family sells textiles or handicrafts? Why?

2. How often do you (or the vendor) go to the market?
3. Have you ever been accompanied by other family members in the market and tried to teach them how to sell crafts?
4. Where are most of the items you sell made?
5. From where do you buy/obtain the items you sell?
6. What strategies do you use to get customers to buy your products?
7. What do you think about items from other locations (ex: Peru, Colombia, China)?
8. Do you use different strategies for items made by you/your family, those made locally outside your family, and those imported from elsewhere? How do you think customers view your products?
9. Do customers know items from other locations are sold in the market? What do they think about that?

Identity:

1. Do you feel textiles are important for indigenous Otavalans?
2. Do they teach any lessons?
3. Can you explain the meaning behind any designs?
4. What makes an item “Otavalan”?
5. What makes an item “artisanal”?
6. How important do you think craft production will be for Otavalans in the future?
How important do you think selling crafts will be for Otavalans in the future?
7. How often do you dress *de anaco*?
8. Do you feel you have to dress *de anaco* for your family? Or to make sales in the market?
9. Do tourists comment on your appearance?

En español:

Producción de artesanías:

1. ¿Puede tejer en un telar o de cinturón o con agujas? ¿Bordar? ¿Hace cosas con los muros? ¿O produce algo de artesanías?
2. ¿Dónde hace normalmente estos productos (mercado, casa, fábrica)?

3. If they have a factory: ¿Cuántas personas trabajan en su fábrica? ¿Cuántos son miembros de la familia y no familiares?
4. ¿A que edad empezó?
5. ¿Quién le enseñaba?
6. Fue su idea a aprender?
7. ¿Alguna vez le has enseñado a alguien más?
8. ¿Hay alguien más en su familia quien produce artesanías?
9. ¿Existe trabajo que es solo para mujeres o hombres? Puede describir que son y porque solo son para mujeres o hombres?
10. ¿Qué pasa si una mujer complete trabajo de los hombres o si un hombre complete trabajo de las mujeres?
11. ¿Algún tipo de trabajo depende en su edad? Si es así, ¿por qué?
12. ¿Alguna vez le ha descrita/o como una buena mujer / hombre porque puede hacer _____ o una mala mujer / hombre porque no puede hacer _____?

Materiales y estilo:

1. ¿De dónde obtener la mayoría de sus materiales?
2. ¿Hila o pinta su propio hilo?
3. ¿Cuáles son los factores más importantes para obtener materiales?
4. ¿Cómo decide colores y diseños?
5. ¿Alguna vez recibe pedidos de patrones / colores específicos?

Conocimiento de mercado:

1. ¿Quién en su familia vende tejidos o artesanías? ¿Por qué?
2. ¿Con qué frecuencia usted (o el vendedor) va al mercado?
3. ¿Alguna vez ha estado acompañado por otros miembros de la familia en el mercado y trató de enseñarles cómo vender artesanías?
4. ¿Dónde se fabrican la mayoría de las cosas que usted vende?
5. ¿De dónde compra u obtiene las cosas que vende?
6. ¿Qué estrategias usa para lograr que los clientes compren sus productos?
7. ¿Qué piensa sobre los productos de otros lugares (por ejemplo, Perú, Colombia, China)?

8. ¿Utiliza diferentes estrategias para los productos hechos por usted / su familia, los fabricados localmente fuera de su familia y los importados de otros lugares?
¿Cómo cree que los compradores ven sus productos?
9. ¿Los compradores saben que los productos de otras ubicaciones (lugares) se venden en el mercado? ¿Qué piensan ellos de eso?

Identidad:

1. ¿Sientes que los tejidos son importantes para los indígenas Otavaleños?
2. ¿Los tejidos enseñan alguna lección?
3. ¿Puede explicar el significado de algún diseño?
4. ¿Qué hace que un producto Otavaleño? ¿Cuáles son las calidades de un producto Otavaleño?
5. ¿Qué hace un producto artesanal?
6. ¿Cuán importante cree que será la producción artesanal para los Otavaleños en el futuro? ¿Cuán importante cree que vender artesanías será para Otavaleños en el futuro?
7. ¿Con qué frecuencia se viste de anaco / como indígena?
8. ¿Siente que debe vestirse de anaco para su familia? ¿O para hacer ventas en el mercado?
9. Do tourists comment on your appearance? ¿Los turistas comentan sobre su apariencia o ropa?

APPENDIX 2. FAMILY HISTORIES

I collected family histories to chart the intergenerational transmission of knowledge regarding craft production and distribution through familial relationships. By conducting family histories, I gained long-term knowledge about gendered labor, market strategies, and knowledge transmission within families that I compare to other data.

Family History Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me the full names of your family members?
2. Do you know when they were born or how old they are?
3. Can you describe what work they do?
4. Do any of them make handicrafts?
5. When you were young, what did your parents do for a living? What do they do now?
6. As a child, did you contribute to the family income or help your parents in their work in any way?
7. What other relatives did you have contact with growing up?
8. What do you remember about your grandparents? Aunt and uncles?
9. What were your duties around the house as a child? What your siblings' duties? How did duties break down by gender?
10. What skills did you learn (e.g., cooking, agriculture, handicrafts) and who taught you? What activities did the family do together?
11. Describe the community you grew up in. Races and ethnicities in neighborhood, what people did for a living, class differences.
12. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
13. What were your plans when they finished school? Education? Work?
14. What did your parents think of your plans?
15. Did the boys and girls in the family have different plans/expectations?
16. How did you meet your spouse/significant other? What drew you together?
17. How would you say the world has changed since you were young?
18. What were you told, both positive and negative, about being indigenous (from both inside your family and outside of it)?
19. Have you ever experienced discrimination?

Preguntas Sobre Historia Familiar

1. ¿Me puede decir los nombres completos de los miembros de su familia?
2. ¿Sabe cuándo nació o cuántos años tiene cada persona?
3. ¿Puede describir qué trabajo hace cada persona?
4. ¿Alguno de ellos hace artesanías?
5. Cuando era joven, ¿qué tipo de trabajo hicieron sus padres para vivir? ¿Qué hacen ahora?
6. Cuando era niño, ¿contribuí con el ingreso familiar o ayudaste a tus padres en su trabajo de alguna manera?
7. ¿Con qué otros parientes tuvo contacto al crecer?
8. ¿Qué recuerda de sus abuelos? ¿Tía y tíos?
9. ¿Cuáles eran sus deberes en la casa cuando era niño? ¿Cuáles eran los deberes de sus hermanos? ¿Cómo se descompusieron los deberes por género?
10. ¿Qué habilidades aprendió (por ejemplo, cocina, agricultura, artesanías) y quién le enseñó? ¿Qué actividades hizo la familia juntos?
11. Describa la comunidad en la que creció. Razas y etnicidades en el vecindario, lo que las personas hicieron para ganarse la vida, diferencias de clase.
12. De niño, ¿qué quería ser cuando creciera?
13. ¿Cuáles eran sus planes cuando terminaron la escuela? ¿Sobre educación y trabajo?
14. ¿Qué pensaban sus padres de sus planes?
15. ¿Los niños y niñas de la familia tenían diferentes planes / expectativas?
16. ¿Cómo conoció a su esposo/a / novio/a? ¿Qué los unió?
17. ¿Cómo diría que la comunidad ha cambiado desde que era joven? ¿El mundo?
18. ¿Qué le dijeron, tanto positivo como negativo, sobre ser indígena (tanto dentro de su familia como fuera de ella)?
19. ¿Alguna vez ha experimentado discriminación?

APPENDIX 3. MODIFIED PHOTOVOICE METHODOLOGY

I explained how I intended to use modified photovoice and what I needed from my interlocutors in this way: Me gustaría tener su ayuda con mis investigaciones. Traje una cámara para compartir con la comunidad y puedo enseñarle cómo usarla. Me gustaría que tomara fotos de la producción y venta de artesanías, para que pueda mostrarme lo que es importante. Si acepta hacer esto, le prestaré la cámara por una semana. Puede tomar tantas fotografías en su casa, fábrica o mercado como piensa ser necesario. Después, revisaremos las fotos juntas. Podemos hablar sobre por qué las tomó y qué significan. Luego, puede seleccionar las que cree que son las mejores. Puedo usarlas en mi tesis o presentaciones en mis investigaciones. Si lo desea, imprimiré copias de las fotos que le muestren a usted, a su trabajo o a su familia (si dan permiso) que le puede dar como agradecimiento por ayudar con mis investigaciones. ¿Tiene algunas preguntas?

In English: I would like your help with my research. I brought a camera for the community to share, and I can teach you how to use it. I would like you to take photos of craft production and selling, so you can show me what is important. If you agree to do this, I will lend you the camera for a week. You can take as many photos in your home, factory, and/or market as you think are necessary. Afterward, we will go through the photos together. We can talk about why you took them and what they mean. Then, you can select the ones you think are the best. I may use them in my thesis or presentations on my research. If you would like, I will print copies of the photos showing you, your work, or your family (as long as they give permission) that you may keep as a thank you for helping with my research. Do you have any questions?

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