

# **Rurality from the perspective of its inhabitants: Analyzing participant responses to in-depth questionnaires, photographs and reflections from an ethnographic study in Southern Ecuador**

**Emilia ALONSO-MARKS**  
markse@ohio.edu  
Ohio University (United States)

**Iván SALAZAR-TORNEZ**  
ivsaltor@gmail.com  
Ohio University (United States)

## **La ruralidad desde la perspectiva de sus habitantes: análisis de las respuestas de los participantes a cuestionarios en profundidad, fotografías y reflexiones de un estudio etnográfico en el sur de Ecuador<sup>1</sup>**

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### Abstract

As part of an outgoing ethnographic study we examined the narratives, photographs and reflections produced by participants from four rural communities within the Gonzanamá district, Loja province, southern Ecuador on the advantages and disadvantages of rural living. In this study, it is analyzed how these rural communities have created a dissident voice from the power relationships established by society, the government and the scientific community.

Results have revealed how this three-part process was a powerful tool to give a voice to those who do not have one, to claim their rural spaces that define who they are as a community, and to state how to live true to their cultural heritage. In addition, these results have confirmed the contribution that qualitative studies make in the advancement of any type of quantitative study, especially in the area of international development.

**Keywords:** ethnography, qualitative research, rural communities, power relations, international development, postcolonialism.

### Resumen

Como parte de un estudio etnográfico reciente, examinamos las narrativas, fotografías y reflexiones producidas por participantes de cuatro comunidades rurales dentro del distrito de Gonzanamá, provincia de Loja, en el sur de Ecuador, sobre las ventajas y desventajas de la vida rural. En el estudio, se analiza cómo tales comunidades rurales han desarrollado una voz disidente a partir de las relaciones de poder establecidas por la sociedad, el Gobierno y la comunidad científica.

Los resultados han revelado cómo este proceso de tres partes fue una herramienta poderosa para dotar de voz a aquellos que no la tienen; para reclamar sus espacios rurales, que definen quiénes son como comunidad, y para establecer cómo vivir de manera fiel a su patrimonio cultural. Además, dichos resultados han confirmado la contribución que los estudios cualitativos hacen en el avance de cualquier tipo de estudio cuantitativo, especialmente en el área de desarrollo internacional.

**Palabras clave:** etnografía, investigación cualitativa, comunidades rurales, relaciones de poder, desarrollo internacional, poscolonialismo.

# 1

## Brief introduction to qualitative social research and photovoice

Qualitative social researchers have used a combination of methods to investigate diverse phenomena, and there is strong agreement that combining methods such as in-depth interviews, narratives and images through photovoice, among others can yield important insights and understandings (Harper 1998, Pink 2001, Creswell *et al.* 2007). This mixed method approach has been epistemologically aligned to emancipation and has methodological links to participatory action research, in the sense that it gives voice and visibility to marginalized individuals who otherwise may remain unheard and unseen (Olliffe *et al.* 2008).

Interviewing is perhaps the most common format of data collection in qualitative research. Most of the qualitative research interviews can be either unstructured or structured. According to Bernard (1988), semi-structured interviews are the best option when the interviewer will not get another chance to interview someone. They are usually conducted once and generally last between 30 minutes to an hour (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). The interviewer usually relies on a guide comprised of the core question or several core questions and many associated questions related to the central one(s). Although sometimes the inclusion of open-ended questions may stray from the interview guide, these questions provide the opportunity for identifying new ways of perceiving and understanding the topic explored, plus it allows informants to have the freedom to express their views in their own terms. In their 2016 study, Davies, Crowe and Whitehead employed a qualitative narrative inquiry approach which included in-depth interviews with thematic analysis where participants were able to narrate their experiences in order to «create meaning in their lives by the way they construct[ed] their narrative» (p. 534). In the same vein, Samararatne & Soldatic (2014) employed a qualitative methodology based on grounded theory, a methodology that seeks to develop conceptual frameworks focused on the participants' individual experiences.

Another way to give voice and visibility to marginalized individuals and a common format of data collection in qualitative research is photovoice. Photovoice allows researchers from various disciplines to visualize individuals' perceptions of their everyday realities (Close 2007, Foster-Fishman *et al.* 2005). For participants, the photovoice process provides the opportunity to portray experiences visually and to share their personal knowledge of particular issues that may be difficult to express by means of words alone (Wang & Burris 1997). Through the use of photographs, different ideas may be obtained than those gathered solely from in-depth interviews (Darbyshire *et al.* 2005). It is the combination of the narrative and visual illustrations that enhances the ability of researchers to capture the meaning of an issue from the participants' point of

view more accurately (Harrison 2002, McIntyre 2003, Nowell *et al.* 2006). Thus, the resulting narratives obtained from the photo stories may become a rich platform from which researchers can offer a nuanced understanding of issues affecting a particular community to the scientific community, which in turn can inform appropriate intervention or action on health and social problems.

Although there is a strong general agreement that photovoice can produce rich data, yet there are several challenges of analyzing participant-produced photographs to generate study findings. In the case of the present study, photographs were not intended to be formally analyzed nor interpreted by the participants themselves. The photographs were used as reinforcement of the narratives produced by participants throughout the in-depth interviews. For example, when prompted to take a picture that would represent the advantages of living in rurality, participants took pictures of their gardens, the landscape, and their pets and farm animals. Those pictures matched the narrative by which they described the advantages of rural living.

## 2 The ethnographic study: description and methodology

In the present study, it is investigated how people describe the advantages of living rurally in contrast with the narrative of scientific epistemology and rigor coming from government officials and the scientific community. Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, thirty-five (35) participants were recruited from three rural *barrios* (Jurupe, Naranjillo, and Trigopamba) from the *parroquia* of Changaimina, *cantón* Gonzanamá, Loja province, Ecuador. Participants ranged in age between twenty and sixty. Twelve (12) of them were males and twenty-three (23) females. Individual digitally recorded semi-structured interviews and photovoice were the primary methods of data collection. The interviews were conducted during regularly scheduled visits from the state Department of Health. These visits were coordinated with students and scientists from a prestigious university in Ecuador and a prestigious university in the Midwest, United States, in order to make sure the houses were clean from insects that could potentially propagate insect-borne diseases such as dengue, malaria or Chagas.<sup>2</sup>

The cohorts of scientists and students who conducted the interventions, *i.e.*, house visits looking for *chinchorros* both in the domicile and peridomicile areas, were comprised of nutritionists, nurses, doctors, entomologists, architects, and social scientists as part of the Healthy Living Initiative (HLI) program. The HLI is an interdisciplinary project to assist, with socio-economic development programs, rural communities in southern Ecuador affected by Chagas disease. The idea is to provide a wholistic support system

2 Chagas disease is caused through contact with the feces or urine of parasite *trypanosoma cruzi*. The insect that carries the parasite or *chinchorro* lives in the nooks and cracks of house walls and roofs. It is a neglected disease linked to poverty particularly in rural and semi-rural areas in Latin America. Chagas disease is considered as one of the leading diseases in causing more loss of years of healthy life and productivity due to debilitation and disability in Latin America (Hotez *et al.* 2008).

in the prevention of illnesses associated with poverty by means of facilitating participative processes of sustainable human development where the entire communities are involved. The intervention plan consisted of the following steps: *a)* the interviewer gave a brief introduction to the person who identified himself or herself as the person in charge of the household; *b)* the interviewer provided a detailed explanation of the project and the intervention plan; *c)* the interviewer obtained written consent from the person in charge of the household to carry out the intervention; *d)* the interviews were conducted; *e)* the interviewer went over some literature about Chagas disease and its prevention, and left it with them so that they could share it with other household members; and *f)* participants were invited to take several photographs, but select one photograph of their favorite living space at home – indoors or outdoors (within the peridomicile) representing, in their view, the advantages of living rurally.

The semi-structured questionnaires used when conducting the in-depth interviews consisted of seven (7) questions related to advantages and/or disadvantages of living rurally: 1) how long have you lived in this house?; 2) where did you live before you moved to this house?; 3) which are your daily activities?, how long do you spend outdoors versus indoors?, where do you eat?, where do you sleep?; 4) which aspects of your house (indoors or outdoors) –the tranquility, the spaciousness, the luminosity, etc.— do you enjoy the most?, why?; 5) if you could change anything in your house, what would you change?, why?; 6) how has the intervention impacted your daily life?, have you made any life style changes based on the information the group of scientists, students, nurses, nutritionists, and public health officials have given you?, and 7) was the intervention conducted to your satisfaction? If not, what would you change?

The interviews were conducted by one of the social scientists along with one or two students. These interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes. During the interviews, participants were invited to take several photos of their properties with the interviewer's iPad. Then they were asked to select one that would best capture the area that they liked the most within their living spaces – one that would represent the advantages of living in their respective communities. The idea was to reinforce the narratives stated by the in-depth interviews.

### **3 Frameworks for analyzing participant-produced narratives and supportive photos**

We need to address formally two issues affecting our data analysis. On the one hand, although the photographic data were used in support of the narrative data and not in lieu of them, these

needed to be placed both ontologically and epistemologically. On the other hand, in order to interpret the participants' narratives, the present study uses the notion of power —specifically the power of «knowledge»— in the theories of Bourdieu and Foucault, and the postcolonial, post-developmental focus based on flexible notions which anticipate a major decentralization in the ways of representing the Others, especially from the deconstruction of development and coloniality/modernity (Escobar 2009, 2012; Mignolo 2008, 2011a).

### **3.1. The notion of pink's a picture paints a thousand words and photovoice's tenets**

Ontological concepts of truth and reality, along with our claims about the relationship between truth and the pictures we asked participants to take, needed to be situated and validated as truthful forms of representation and interpretation of the reality by whom it is being observed – *i.e.*, Pink's (2001) idea that «a picture paints a thousand words». From the epistemological standpoint, photovoice enables participants to employ photography as a way of researching their own cultures and to reference aspects of their own experiences. This is in sharp contrast with the traditional view whereby the responsibility of analyzing and interpreting pictures would rest in the hands of anthropologists and ethnographers.

### **3.2. The notion of knowledge as power in the theories of Bourdieu and Foucault**

The concept of *power* is an elusive one, especially within post-modern discourse. There are a series of perspectives on power which have been rooted in the theories of sociologists and economists Max Weber and Karl Marx. For Weber (1958), *power* is the opportunity of human beings to realize their own will in a communal action against those who resist. Power and authority are thus linked. When the exercise of power (or force) is conceived as legitimate, it becomes authority (or institutional authority). In contrast, for Marx (1970), *power* is concentrated in the ruling classes, based on economics, and involves class struggles.

Power in the post-modern world needs to be reconceptualized under a different lens, a lens other than the judicial-political theory of sovereign power and the participation of the state. As Foucault indicates, the state (or class, or group of individuals) cannot cover the entire spectrum of power networks that encompass sexuality, kinship, knowledge, information, communication, technology, etc. «Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up» (Foucault 1979, p. 202). Bourdieu constructs a theory of *symbolic power* and talks about the need

to uncover power where it might not be readily identifiable. He defines symbolic power as the capacity to create reality, but is exercised subtly, by means of indirect, socio-cultural mechanisms. It is also subordinated power; the kind of «invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even they themselves exercise it» (Bourdieu 1994, p. 164). In his view, power is the instrument used to impose a certain vision of society and social order. From the perspective of class conflicts and power divisiveness, the goal of the symbolic struggle is to impose the notion of social order that is best suited to the interests of the ruling class. Similarly, the dominant discourse in society aims at imposing an apprehension of the established order as natural. This translates into a form of subtle control or control that is misrecognized as a set of societal norms that are not inculcated but learned «naturally».

Analogously to the methodology in Bourdieu's theory, in Foucault's view the analysis of power should stem from micro-level rather than from macro-institutional level so that it can reveal the concrete histories, techniques and tactics of power. In turn, such ascending analysis of power can reveal how different mechanisms have been appropriated, transformed, colonized and spread by global forms of domination. In Foucault's eyes, power cannot be exercised without knowledge and vice versa: it would be impossible for knowledge not to engender power. These are interdependent.

Similarly to Bourdieu, for Foucault, knowledge is power over others; the kind of power that defines *others*, because power «produces reality [...], [it] produces domains of objects and rituals of truth» (Foucault 1979, p. 194). Thus, nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power —this *regime of truth*— that function around, within and alongside the state frameworks, are not also changed. According to Foucault, the regime of truth in modern society leads to *disciplinary power*, that is, a key instrument in the formation of industrial capitalism, and a society that values the emergence of human sciences. He underlined the role of human sciences, as they have made human beings both subjects of study and subjects of the state. Foucault defined *discipline* as a «specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise [...]. [I]t functions as a calculated, but permanent economy» (Foucault 1979, p. 170). The means through which disciplinary power achieves its hold are hierarchical observation or surveillance, normalizing judgement, and examination. All these mechanisms of discipline, on the one hand seek to impose homogeneity and, on the other, classification and the distribution of rank.

The study of these rural communities in Ecuador portrays a framework in which the socio-cultural order has been constructed on different principles which contrast with those from the «established» order. The oppressive hegemonic discourse—which in the present context comes from public health officials and the scientific/academic community insisting that people live unhealthy lives, in isolated communities affected by insect-borne diseases, poisoned water and malnutrition—has failed to acknowledge that these rural communities possess alternative mechanisms to function optimally. In order to «alternative» societies to develop their full potential as societies in their own right, with governance and sovereignty, there needs to be an open dialogic relationship with the «established» democratically elected order. There is no need to implement power networks that, as Foucault states, cannot cover a spectrum as a whole. There is no room for the exercise of power by means of a narrative that has been established as stemming from a «natural» order within social structures, such as rural communities, with their own ancestral value systems. Bourdieu addresses the nature of the dominant discourse from this perspective; that is, the imposition of power by which urbanized elites pursue to control minorities living in outlying urban areas or rural areas. What we see is a lack of conceptualization of what rurality entails, which in turn has had negative consequences for assessing its significance as a legitimate social structure. Rural communities have been seen subordinate environments because they do not share the materialistic principles that sustained urbanized communities. The communities in southern Ecuador, as many others, face an unjust social order that has not permitted the construction of cooperative relationships, but rather subordinated ones. Nevertheless, as we will see, the *symbolic power* described in Bourdieu's (1994) work, and Foucault's (1979) *regime of truth* get challenged and then undermined by means of the same arguments advanced by those exercising power.

### **3.3. The representation of *the others* in the postcolonial theories of Escobar and Mignolo**

The theory of post-colonialism is a critical approach that deals with a narrative produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries. Post-colonialism can also refer to the current process that people who were subordinated to other imperialist forms of oppression must reclaim and make sense of their past and affirm their self-determination. In this given framework, the concept where certain minorities are considered inferior by racial, hierarchical standards that have been implemented due to political, economic, and social power gets examined. Fanon (1967) argues that these processes have shaped a social environment with a pervasive internal rejection and even contempt toward minority groups and all that they represent.

There are many scholars that have contributed to construct developmental discourses over time. This narrative has stated modernist frameworks by which our societies have been defined. The theories behind these frameworks employ indicators to build realities that have stigmatized poverty geopolitically and created concepts such as «the South», «Third World» or «the Others» to define environments that do not fulfil the standards established by centrist theories. Post-developmental and post-colonialist authors like Escobar (2009, 2012) and Mignolo (2008, 2011a), however, adopt approaches that are based on flexible understandings, which permit a further decentralization in the manner that we represent the Others or those who live in poverty (Gómez-Quintero & Franco Martínez 2014, pp. 86-87). With these attempts, it is sought to redefine a discourse in which ancestral socio-political structures that have been misrepresented get recognized and validated as more harmonious (Césaire 2000).

The new theoretical flow challenges the frameworks by which the social sciences have established hierarchical categories, classifying negatively populations that do not share the same occidental values. For Mignolo (2008, 2011a), the colonial period, besides the political, economic and social domination, produced negative identities in opposition to the conqueror's identity. The prevailing Eurocentric view spread all over the world framed structures which deprived societies from the opportunity to embrace their own principles, forcing them to align to identities that were not part of their original values as communities.

Development, aligning with «First World» values, is an outcome through which the intellectual debate has projected a self-perception of inferiority, underdevelopment and ignorance onto rural communities. This perspective has prompted a strong rejection toward living rurally, because it is opposed to the hegemonic understanding of living «adequately». Rural communities such as indigenous populations all around Latin America have been placed at the bottom of a hierarchically constructed pyramid rather than being included within dynamic socio-political and economic processes. Social sciences should retake the question of restituting social orders by means of practicing collective politics, as social scientists have isolated these local populations only because they do not share the same standard principles. This phenomenon has had harsh consequences in colonized places, such as Latin America, where the contempt for its past has affected the manner like societies are conceived. Rather than embracing what they truly are, societies within this region have tried to be and represent what they are not. The constant desire toward Eurocentrism, make people not even recognize their own identities as valid. This struggle of postcolonial societies to be American without abandoning their Europeanism has been labelled «double creole conscience» or *doble conciencia criolla* (Gómez-

Quintero & Franco Martínez 2014, pp. 88-89). Even in urban circles, «[there is] an unequal participation of indigenous peoples in the labor market [(...) not only because of number of schooling years, but because of] open discrimination» (Gigler 2015, pp. 36-37). In a series of studies, it has been pointed out how the economic crisis of the rural sector is a reflection of both the economic neglect and the collapse of rural development strategies based on Westernized models. «Frequently these programs [have] failed to incorporate indigenous cultural identity, values, and worldviews into their design. Indigenous [...] organizational structures and traditional knowledge and technologies have been generally ignored [...], provoking cultural disruption [...]. The result has been a significant transfer of financial resources from international donors to rural areas, which has failed to achieve a sustainable impact on the well-being of indigenous communities» (Gigler 2015, p. 35).

Postcolonial theories oppose hegemonic discourse. These theories are not exclusive not because they do not state a centric model to which society and its structures must adhere, but rather they argue the need to address local perspectives in order to build more inclusive parameters. According to Mignolo (2008, 2001a), this opposed narrative demands to consider multicultural indicators to portray a more accurate representation of numerous social groups. The idea would be to design a more open normative model in which socio-political and economic processes are not stated by one group only. Post-colonialism overthrows the centrist conceptualization by which the sciences have defined development. This narrative recognizes the existence of a hierarchical construct that has placed non-hegemonic societies at the bottom of a system that has crushed their dreams and oppressed their existence.

Postcolonialism argues that development is conceived as a meta-narrative of modernity, as an Eurocentric construction that thinks and organizes time and space in its totality (Gómez-Quintero & Franco Martínez 2014, p. 89; Grosfoguel 2011, p. 3; Mignolo 2002, p. 59). That is, developmental theories have portrayed a reality that only takes into consideration patterns traced historically by the well-known hegemonic powers. Thus, there is a notorious lack of recognition for those perspectives that do not share specific similarities with the well-known model. These theories have stated universal principles isolating other realities that have different historical and cultural specificities as part of their backgrounds. In this sense, the general understanding of development does not fit within other conceptualizations, as it does not apply the same principles to analyze different socio-economic contexts. Therefore, it is necessary to decentralize a vision that negatively affects numerous marginalized peoples, including rural communities. It is key to address a broader picture

opening the possibility to represent a variety of models allowing for more inclusivity.

There is a need to deconstruct the given narrative because the post-colonialist approach is limited by the interpretation of western structures. The decentralization of this prevalent narrative is the only path to promote a better understanding of different socio-economic structures that are also legitimate and valid. Therefore, what the new theoretical flow seeks to challenge is the evolutionist practices provided by the hegemonic model in which certain societies have been classified negatively and placed at the bottom of a hierarchical system.

## 4 Analyzing participant-produced narratives

Residents in the communities under study led sedentary lives. A great number of participants declared that they had lived in the same house/living spaces between ten and thirty years. Their mobility strategies had been to move within the same family-owned lot —above or below their parents' home— when they got married or felt ready to start their own families. Residents did not typically abandon their original community, unless it had been to improve their economy or to have access to better professional opportunities for themselves or education opportunities for their children. A female interviewee from the rural barrio of Trigopamba who had not moved in thirty years explained:

Aquí en esta casita vivo yo ya este unos treinta (30) años... Yo tuve una casita más abajo, pero era una pequeñita y luego hicimos esta, más grandecita, pero, en total, lo que yo voy viviendo aquí son cuarenta y dos (42) años. Aquí en la comunidad cuarenta y dos (42) años. [Cuando me casé me vine aquí,] a una casita más bajita y tenía mis hijitos y luego hicimos una más grandecita y aquí. [Toda mi familia es también] de esta comunidad. [Llevo] aquí toda la vida; sí, toda la vida..., ajá [I have lived in this house thirty years... I had a house further down, but it was small and then we built one that was bigger, but I have lived here for a total of forty-two years. When I got married, I came here to a small house and I had my children and then built here one that was bigger. All my family is also from this community. I have been here all my life; yes, all my life] (TP 405).

Another female interviewee from the same barrio, Trigopamba, explained the same situation, except for, when the time came, she decided to move to an adjacent city, and then returned to her original community for family visits:

[Vivo aquí] desde el 2004..., más de diez años. [Antes vivíamos] aquí mismo..., al lado; o sea, teníamos para que nos diera para otra casita. Y ahí se nos hizo esta casa nueva. [Aquella casita] era de barro. Entonces así, no por los bichos, mi hermana que estaba en España, ella les ayudó

[a mis padres] a construir esta viviendita. [Sin embargo,] yo viví [aquí] hasta los doce años; de ahí me fui a estudiar. Vivo en Loja [(I have lived here) since 2004..., more than ten years. (Before, we lived) right here..., next door; that is, we had enough for another house. And this house was built there. (That house) was made of adobe. Then, not because of the bugs, my sister, who was in Spain, helped (my parents) build this house. (Nevertheless,) I lived (here) until I was twelve; then, I left for college. I live in Loja] (TP 402).

This narrative clearly portrays how community residents have lived in rurality for extended periods of time. Their socio-economic and political structures have developed from a variety of values and cultural standards that have prompted them to perceive life differently. Living in rurality does not share in the understanding through which modernization conceives of developed societies. The centrist lens through which social actors are observed does not accept minority perspectives. There is no room for those. Nevertheless, it is possible to note that although residents are not truly considered part of the strategic interventions, they are willing to participate and become agents in the improvement of their own lives. People living in rurality are open to listen, but that does not mean that they will accept the idea of changing their lifestyle completely. This is where the analysis of power addressed by Foucault takes place. Power needs to be understood from a different perspective, an approach that can lead to establish power relationships on equal grounds embracing grassroot structures that are true to their community core values.

The vast majority of participants worked at home, in their fields and gardens, tending their cows and goats, Guinea pigs and chickens. All interviewees, without exception, chose living outdoors and the peridomicile as their favorite spot. The reasons they advanced were consistently about the perception of peacefulness, clean air, community, convenience, beauty, spaciousness, freedom, etc. To them, there was nothing like living in the countryside. When participants were invited to take a photograph of the favorite spot in their houses, they took pictures of the breathtaking views from their yards, or their flower gardens, or their pets placidly taking naps. A male interviewee who had lived in his barrio of Naranjillo for sixty years explained to us that:

[Me gusta vivir aquí,] porque vivir en otro lado es un poco dificultoso, porque [allí] a uno nadie lo conoce; uno no tiene amigos. Ya me he aclimatado aquí. Aquí he vivido medio siglo. Tengo sesenta años. [Me gusta vivir aquí porque] aquí pasa; pasar aquí es tranquilo. Por aquí no hay problemas, así de delincuencia, ninguna cosa. Eso, la gente mayoría honrada entonces vivimos bien y ya nos hemos acostumbrado a vivir aquí. [Pero me gusta ir al pueblo] los domingos. Sí, uno se va a comprar las cosas, para pues lo del arroz, aceite, jabón y eso, las sáleres, azúcar. Eso, eso no más. Y a oír la misa, eso no más; [uno] tiene la costumbre de salir los domingos y viene el domingo; se va a pasar el domingo de madrugadita y ya esta tarde aquí. Y se sigue toda la semana; aquí se pasa [(I love living here) because living anywhere else is a bit difficult, because (there) no one knows you, once does not have friends. I have

already acclimated here. I have lived here half a century. I am sixty years old. (I like living here because) living here is peaceful. There are no problems with crime. People are generally honest. Therefore, we live well. We are already accustomed to living here. (However, I enjoy going to town) on Sundays. Yes, one goes shopping for rice, oil, soap, salt, sugar. That's it; and going to Mass. That's it. One is used to go out on Sundays, and then Sunday comes around and we leave for town early and return in the afternoon. And the rest of the week follows] (NJ 311).



**Photograph 1**

A twenty-seven-year-old mother of three from the barrio of Jurupe commented:

[Me gusta vivir aquí porque] la tierrita es sana. Da todo lo que siembres. Da todo lo que siegues [...]. No hay mucha enfermedad y, si hay una enfermedad, es pasajera... Es una comunidad que ningún peligro de alguno de los carros. Ni los niños, igual; a la escuela van, se puede decir, seguros. Se confía en que no les va a pasar nada. Está cerca misma de la educación. No es muy lejos. [La escuelita] está cerquita, cerquita... Se los manda de aquí cuarto para las siete; como entran a las siete en punto y ya llegan hasta ir abajo ya llegan... un poquito más pronto [(I like living here because) the land is healthy. It yields everything you plant. It yields everything you collect (...). There is hardly any sickness; and if there is any, it doesn't stick... It's a community where there is no danger with cars. And the kids, to school, they can walk safely. We trust nothing is going to happen to them. It is also close to education. It is not very far. The little school is very close... One can send them from here 15 minutes before 7, as school starts at 7 o'clock, and they make it to the bottom..., a little bit sooner] (JU 110).



**Photograph 2**

The centrist model does not take into consideration the advantages that people associate with living in rurality. The problem with these two perspectives, the view from the top down versus the view centered in community values, is that the interaction between the two is based on hierarchical principles. The narrative is best explained by the notions of power in the theories of Bourdieu and Foucault. The key element whereby western standards have remained unchallenging superior has been the creation of a framework that has defined the manner like Others are perceived. The centrist model and the strategies that come with it has not sought to design an interactionist model that could lead to dialog. As Foucault (1979) argues, power must come from the micro-level, rather than being imposed from the macro-institutional level. We believe we need to create a model in which both perspectives could equally be heard. The core issue is that the centrist model is only interested in imposing structures that do not bring life, that do not fulfill the expectations of people living in rural areas. This idea is in consonance with the findings of studies like Healy (2004) and Gigler (2015). These studies indicate that centrist, Westernized-based programs tend to ignore indigenous people's values and traditions, thus contributing to the erosion and invalidation of ancestral community structures and rendering sustainable initiatives impractical.

Participant narratives frame the multiple processes through which rural communities have been stigmatized as a result of poverty. The social construction of this focus has been aligned with standards established by the so-called «western modernity» (Mignolo 2011b). In this sense, the construction of *symbolic power* argued by Bourdieu (1994) plays a substantial role. Western

modernity has defined environments and mechanisms that have deeply influenced the manner like other realities are perceived. In consequence, rural communities have been portrayed as been behind, underdeveloped spaces in need of rescuing by westernized, strong economic structures. Thus, the power struggle gets perpetuated and the chances for participatory dialog get dimmed.

Participants, in general, were happy with their present living conditions and mentioned that, if they were to receive public funding, they would make their houses bigger by adding one or two extra rooms; they would repair and/or replace the roof with better materials; adding concrete to the dirt floors, and reinforcing the adobe walls with concrete to cover any cracks there might have been in them, in order to make them safer or prevent the entrance of insects or other dangerous insect-borne mammals like rats or squirrels. A female interviewee from the barrio of Jurupe wished:

[Cambiar] el techo y el piso. Eso le cambiaría. Sí, quiero cambiarle con el tiempo. Quiero cambiarle lo que es techo y piso. La parte de arriba mucho nos entra el polvo a los cuartos. Y la parte de abajo como que tenemos el tablado mucho se mete la rata. Entonces, eso...; por eso queremos cambiar. Pero si no lo cambiamos es por el dinero. Claro, porque es muy costoso... y es bien costoso para los materiales [(Change) the roof and floor. I would change that. Yes, I would like to change it in time... In the upstairs part, dirt comes in. And in the downstairs part, since we have wooden planks underneath, rats come in. Hence, we want to make repairs. However, if we don't renovate, it is because we don't have any money. That's it, because it is costly...; construction materials make it costly] (JU 417).



**Photograph 3**

A male interviewee from the barrio of Trigopamba expanded:

[Mi casita] yo la cuido bien [...]. Sí, por eso yo no pienso tumbarla todavía. Aquí vivo yo bien. Está hermosa la casa. [Pero,] tal vez, con el tiempo, la tumbé y pare otra...: una más grande..., de hacerla de cemento..., toda de cemento [(My little house) I take good care of it. Yes, that's why I am not going to redo it yet. I live well here. The house is beautiful. (However,) perhaps in time I will redo it and build another one...: a larger one..., to make it out of concrete..., all out of concrete] (TP 202).



**Photograph 4**

For people living in rurality, development and modernity have defined the social interaction patterns with the structures in power. This has translated into an oppressive discourse in which rural communities and their alternative, non-mainstream practices are not well received because of the stark contrast with the hegemonic model. There is a need then for the social environment to be reconceptualized through a different lens, a narrative that could add significance to those other alternative social structures that do not fulfill the expectations of modernity. As Foucault (1979) argued, *disciplinary power* has created a framework in which the Others are object of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and examination. Rather than giving participation to minority groups, this narrative has allowed stakeholders to criticize and change those other social structures that do not perfectly align with the ones implemented by the centrist model. In this sense, post-colonialism can provide a forum that is inclusive of their perspective. Rural communities have been underrepresented as a consequence of social, racial and legal barriers (Healy 2004, Gigler 2015). As Foucault and Bourdieu have argued, the dominant discourse in society aims at imposing an apprehension of the

established order as natural, where natural implies a rejection of those other parallel structures that have been deemed unfit and even dangerous.

Residents were happy where they were and had difficulty coming up with disadvantages of living in a rural barrio. Some young families with children considered living away from a main road or a clinic a disadvantage. Some also mentioned lack of employment. For older folks, the major disadvantages of living in their rural barrios were solitude and a feeling of abandonment. Nevertheless, the general trend was for folks to focus on the advantages of their rural communities rather than on the disadvantages. For an elderly male resident from the barrio of Naranjillo,

[no veo ningún inconveniente de vivir aquí,] pues todo es más tranquilo... Acá es muy bueno. Uno la pasa nomás tranquilo, nomás [...]. Uno está en un pueblo como encerrado. No hay cómo salir a la calle para evitar los carros, hacer cualquier cosa. Y aquí uno la pasa libre, tranquilo. No hay ya intención de salir a la ciudad. No uno solito que se hace ya viejo. Voy pa los ochenta y dos años [(I don't see a disadvantage to live here) as everything is more placid... It's very good here. One spends the days in tranquility, that's it (...). One lives in a large town as if he were locked up. There is no way to leave one's house to avoid cars and do things. Whereas here one spends one's days free, at peace. I have no intention to leave for the city. Not by myself now that I am old. I am turning eighty-two years of age] (NJ 306).



**Photograph 5**

In contrast a middle-aged female resident from the barrio of Trigopamba told us she would much rather live with her son, so that she did not feel lonely. However, she realized it would not be an easy transition, as she would miss her community:

Yo me quiero ir... de aquí... a vivir con mi hijo menor... Mi hijo me quiere llevar a Quito..., porque yo solita aquí vivo desamparada... [Mi hijo] me quiere llevar, pero no me quiero ir todavía..., porque me da pena de todo... [I want to leave... here... to live with my younger son... My son wants to take me to Quito..., because I live by myself abandoned here... (My son) wants to take me, but I don't want to leave yet..., because everything makes me sad...] (TP 210).

With respect to the intervention itself, participants reported it had been extremely positive as they continued to apply what they had learned about Chagas disease prevention. Most of the participants, however, confided in us that their worries did not rest on contracting Chagas, as their houses had been insect free for quite some time. A female resident of the barrio of Naranjillo explained that, while she found value in the information provided by the intervention teams, the recommendations were not as pertinent:

[...] de pronto tenemos que [revisar la casita]..., pero aquí no hay ni pulga ni chinches ni nada de eso... [Del chinchorro] no tenemos problemas aquí [...]. El año pasado..., antes de que [los equipos] llegaran, ya nos dijeron que iban a venir [y] que este, que había ese animal que lo querían combatir. Aquí no encontraron ni uno [(...) sure, we have to (check our house)..., but here there is no flea, no bug, nothing... (With the *chinchorro*) we have no problems here (...). Last year..., before (the teams) got here we had been told they were coming (and) that this, they wanted to fight the animal (= insect). Here they didn't find a single one of them] (NJ 310).

Participants' worries lied on how to address their current ailments, such as hypertension, high cholesterol and diabetes, and also how to take care of expensive house bills, particularly electricity; and how to combat solitude and a deep sense of abandonment. They complained about the lack of attention from the scientific community as well as the government and the community at large, the *parroquia*, *cantón*, and province. An elderly female resident of the barrio of Trigopamba mentioned to us:

[...] me gusta bastante [que vengan los equipos de intervención,] porque uno vive muy lejos del pueblo... y usted sabe que en el campo, de repente, nos enfermamos en el silencio de la noche. Muchas de las veces..., hasta nos toca morir. Vivimos así, lejos como ve... [(...) I enjoyed very much (that the teams come,) because one lives very far away from town... and you know that in the country we get sick in the middle of the night. Many times, we even die. We live like that, far as you can see...] (TP 102).

Another female resident of the same *barrio* was grateful for the visits, and sadly referred to the cost of living as one of the key difficulties affecting the community:

Yo sí les pido con fe que me ayuden, que me ayuden por favor hasta que me muera. [Aquí no han venido los señores del servicio de fumigación]. No han venido. Nadie, nadie han venido. Solo de la luz viene a verla. No más de la luz, nada más. A mí me están cobrando la luz carísima. Me cobran por alumbrarme acá adentro y la cocinita acá afuera también. Me cobran trece dólares cada mes, sí, con cincuenta centavos. Eso pago yo y entonces eso recibo el boleto. No más lo paso y lo que me sobra, para el jaboncito, la sal, lo que sea y se acabó [I pray with faith that

they help me, that they please help me until I die. (Here the folks from fumigation services haven't come). Only the guys from the electric company come to check. Only the ones from the electric company, that's it. They are charging me \$13.50. That's how much I pay and then they send me the bill. I just pay it and with what I have left I buy soap, salt, whatever, and that's it] (TP 104).

The community was welcoming of the teams of experts. They were grateful for their expertise and the information they shared. Nevertheless, the focus resided in the sense of fellowship; they felt fulfilled, reclaimed, accompanied and supported. A male resident of the barrio of Jurupe recounted:

Me siento satisfecho [de que vengan], o sea, para mí es un orgullo, una suerte que se le den cuenta del lugar, de las viviendas que a lo mejor tengan ese insecto [...]. Es un apoyo para el lugar, para todo, para el ambiente mismo. Sí, hasta yo estoy contento y les felicito de mi parte... que sigan así, que vengan de vez en cuando a darse cuenta de la zona, cómo se encuentra y, sobre todo, para la salud de las personas [I feel satisfied (with your visit), that is, for me it is a sense of pride, I feel lucky that you claim this place, the houses which may have that insect (...) and I congratulate you... Please continue with your job, come every once in a while to claim this area, to see how it is, and above all, to make note of people's health] (JU 103).

It is easily visible that the participants living in these communities are willing to collaborate. They consider the interventions as a manner to engage with others and be recognized by others. All along the problem has been that when these encounters take place, people living in rurality become invisible agents in the process of participatory dialog. Rather than including the values and cultural norms of the people living in rurality, the scientific community and the authorities have sought to make structures that are valued and cherished disappear. It is necessary for all of us to understand that people from these communities are not willing to modernize the environment out of which they derive so much joy and fulfillment.

One of the most prevalent characteristics found in rural communities is the profound connection that people have with Mother Earth. This element is prevalent in participant narratives. In fact, nature is deemed as their most precious value. Their vision must be respected, even if it means to deconstruct the centrist narrative through which modernity has pursued to do away with people's ancestral values. As Foucault and Bourdieu argued, power can reveal how several mechanisms have been transformed, colonized and used by global strategies of domination. The decentralization of this pervasive narrative is the only path to promote a better understanding of different socio-economic structures that are also legitimate and valid. If we are to advance as democratic, global citizens, the perception, promoted by the centrist discourse, that the Others are inferior needs to be revisited and challenged once and for all.

## 5 Analyzing participant-produced photographs

In order to analyze participant-produced photographs, we used Oliffe *et al.*'s (2008) adapted version of a layered analysis approach after Dowdall and Golden (1989). Like in Oliffe *et al.* (2008), the different stages are supposed to: *a*) accommodate the interview data, that is, the participants' narratives; *b*) support the information we had about how the photographs were taken and what they represent; and *c*) our own knowledge of the local culture and practices in rural Ecuador.

### 5.1. First stage: preview

At this stage, the idea was to give advantage to the participants' perspectives. Following each interview, we viewed the photographs along with the participant's narrative which was directly related to each image. In this sense, the narratives provided the context and the clarity necessary to link the photographs to the corresponding commentaries. The purpose of this first analysis was to understand participants' views and intended representations, as well as to how they placed themselves in relation to the image they had captured and how they had captured it. This was key because, by prioritizing the participants' views, so to speak, we were drawn into their interpretations which in turn made us actively engaged with the data and gave us clues to produce future analyses. Although photovoice researchers have used these analytical strategies in different ways and to different degrees, we used them as a base for extending our interpretation of the photographs taken by the participants in our study.

### 5.2. Second stage: review

The goal of this stage was to develop the participants' interpretations of the images they had captured by including other interpretations from the researchers' point of view. We reviewed each of the photographs paying attention to the details depicted in them. We also looked for any supportive and/or incongruous links in the participants' photographs and narratives. The idea was to trace any relationships between cultural values and living rurally in the photographs, and how conflicts over values were represented, *i.e.*, whether participants adhered to the hegemonic discourse or positioned themselves in the margins asserting their ancestral customs, practices and traditions. This review process helped us to consider what might be, from our perspective, inconsistencies between what we were seeing in the participants' photos and accompanying narratives and make note of possible explanations.

For example, Photograph 1, taken by a sixty-year-old male who lived in the Naranjillo barrio provided a close-up of his yard with breathtaking views of the surrounding mountain range. During the interview, he explained how he loved living in the community, because he is used to living there. He mentioned a unique sense of familiarity and fellowship. He associated it with peacefulness and linked it to honesty and generosity. Living well for him was living in a familiar setting that transmitted peace with people one knew and trusted. Linking the photograph and the narrative enabled us to contextualize this participant's account and to make interpretations about socio-cultural fields. The participant exposed the established *symbolic power* (Bourdieu 1994), by asserting his stance of what made sense to him, his family and the community as a whole, and challenging the existing *regime of truth* (Foucault 1979). In other words, living in this *barrio* was living in paradise: look at the mountains, feel the crisp breeze, judge by yourselves... Who can contradict this view? The dominant discourse had to be in agreement and complicit of this view even though it supported a contradicting message – living in this area is unhealthy; houses may be insect-infected; you and your family could be in danger of contracting an incurable disease. Participants who adhered to their ancestral traditions and asserted the value of living rurally challenged both the dominant discourse and the *double creole conscience* (Gómez-Quintero & Franco Martínez 2014), which prevented them from claiming their identity and from giving them a voice.

Another example is the one depicted in Photograph 2, taken by a twenty-seven-year-old mother of three for whom living in the Jurupe *barrio* meant health and well-being, safety and security, as the land was bounty and eating the produce of the land prevented illnesses. No traffic kept the children safe and the school was not far after all. She saw no disadvantages whatsoever to living in her *barrio*. In her narrative, there was no mention to unhealthy practices or malignant diseases. Again, by asserting her stance and adhering to traditional, ancestral community values, she uncovered the *symbolic power*, challenged the *regime of truth* and rejected the *double creole conscience* contesting the hegemonic perspective supported by government officials, public health administrators and the academic-scientific community.

Consistent with the previous idea, Photograph 5, taken by an elderly male resident of the Naranjillo barrio, captured the solemnity of the majestic mountain range visible behind his house. He emphasized the openness, the quietness, the peace he experienced out in his backyard. He compared living in his rural community with living in a large city, where one must beware of things like traffic, for example. By affirming his stance and adhering to ancestral community values, he revealed the hidden *symbolic power* exercised by the proponents of «First World» principles who have projected a self-perception of

servitude and naiveté onto rural communities. Again, the participant defied the hegemonic discourse or centrist conceptualization that the scientific community has used to define development (Mignolo 2008, 2011a). By clearly stating his love for the place where he lived, he opposed the hegemonic understanding of what constitutes living «adequately» or according to the standards of cleanliness, safety and convenience advanced by the «First World».

As we continued to examine each photograph in detail to comprehend the texture and underlying complexities of the participants' narratives, we were also exposed to divergent representations and explanations in the photographs and the written renderings. Although there was always a dominant interpretation, we decided to remain flexible to contrastive readings —voices of dissent, if it were—, which could be made of the same data. In this process subjectivity is prevalent, as people may read the same image in oppositional ways, depending on their life experiences, their societal values, their identity, etc. In this sense, we were not seeking a single truth nor were we judging the participants' positioning. Instead, context —the answer to a specific question— was key as we tried to explain what appear to be contradicting details. An example of a contradicting reading is Photograph 3, taken by a thirty-year-old woman from the Jurupe *barrio*. She chose to depict the lush leaves of the family's papaya tree and their free-range chicken roaming around —the healthy aspects of rural living— along with the «unhealthy» side —the house with the unattached roof and the dirt floor— that the dominant discourse had insistently emphasized. She wanted to reflect both. By doing so, in our view, she only partially challenged the hegemonic view. Her intended message was to indicate that, while family members were leading healthy lives, their house could benefit from some remodeling down the road – take care of the old roof, as dirt came in; and replace the wooden planks underneath the floor, so that rats could not come in. In this sense, adherence to the hegemonic discourse or playing by the rules seemed to have a clear, overt purpose: making some needed home improvements through some government funded program. Another example of what could be interpreted as an oppositional reading is Photograph 4. The forty-five-year-old male participant from the Trigopamba *barrio* strategically chose to depict the corner of his house that had been renovated through to the government-funded program. He seemed to think that was what we wanted to see. He was grateful for the government support. Nevertheless, the main focus of his photograph was the yard, the vegetable garden and the dogs sleeping placidly. His narrative confirmed that he took good care of his house and how beautiful it was. At some point in the interview, he said: «This is where I live». The participant's discourse seemed to adhere to the dominant voice, but it had to be taken with a grain of salt.

### 5.3. Third stage: cross-photo comparison

In this last level of analysis, the entire photographic collection was examined in order to develop categories which would, in turn, reflect the layer of meaning represented in these visual data. Following Collier (2002), we viewed the electronic versions of each photograph using the Google Photos slideshow application and made note of our overall impressions and interpretations. We compared and classified the photographs into categories that had been decided by reaching consensus. This task was not a challenging one, as all the photographs were taken outside and of the participants' peridomicile, including their yards, vegetable and/or flower gardens, fruit orchards, or of the distant mountains and valleys. Although we were working with the photographs in this stage, we were familiar with the corresponding narratives in the previous stages of analysis. That way, the narratives and the contexts in which the photographs were taken were not overlooked.

### 5.4. Fourth stage: deducing

Photographs 1, 2 and 5 were included in the peridomicile alone category, and they, along with many other photographs, directed us to the connections between living rurally and the ancestral values that link communities, *i.e.*, living with one another, raising a family together, creating a safe environment, working the land, living outdoors, breathing clean air, eating wholesome food, etc. These connections were addressed in the fourth stage. In this stage, the photographs from each category were analyzed using the notion of knowledge as power in the theories of Bourdieu and Foucault, and the representation of the Other(s) in the postcolonial theories of Escobar and Mignolo. The purpose of deducing was to develop a more complex, abstract understanding by linking each of the categories to findings which were theoretically informed.

We began the fourth stage by asking pertinent, sensitive questions of the peridomicile alone photographs, such as «what is consistently represented as favorite living spots?» and «what do these photographs tell us in regard to advantages of living rurally?».

With respect to the first question, we interpreted the connections between clean, open spaces as supporting cultural, ancestral ideals about what it means to live rurally. For example, in their photographs, most of the participants presented images of their vegetable gardens, flower beds, fruit orchards, surrounding mountains, or their pets taking naps. Paved roads, modernized bathrooms, concrete walls and floors, ventilated kitchens—all common signifiers of hegemonic rural living—were marginally represented. The focus of most of the photographs were the yards in their actual state, in their natural messiness—perfect in the residents' eyes. The plain adobe walls, the dirt floors, the chickens coming in and out of the kitchen, the coffee

grains becoming sunbaked on the ground were aligned to endearing customs and inherited ways of doing things, of conceiving the world.

In response to the second question, we found that, for the residents, the advantages of living in their communities outweighed the disadvantages. Despite the bombardment of hegemonic arguments to alter their traditional ways for the sake of their own health and that of their families, residents were not willing to give in. They felt some remodeling could be negotiated, provided they received government support to implement the remodeling plans. Nevertheless, some of the changes in lifestyle, personal hygiene, and even relocation, were not negotiable. Photographs 3 and 4 illustrate how some participants considered important implementing partial changes to their homes, in consonance with the hegemonic discourse. We interpreted the incidental capturing of a corner of their improved homes as a way of saying we are listening, we are compliant, but that is not the main focus of what it means for us to live in our communities. The focus was on their blooming plants and ready-to-pick vegetables and fruits, the crisp view of the surrounding mountains, the quietness of summer afternoons. Those values were an integral part of the fabric of who they were as individuals and as members of their respective communities.

## 6 Conclusion

Extending the analyses of participant-produced photographs beyond the accompanying narratives provided a rich source of data and key insights, in this case, to residents' perspectives of living rurally against the backdrop of the dominant discourse. This discourse advocates for standardized solutions and urbanization, subtly dismissing the communities' ties to their cultural heritage.

The first reading of the photographs resided in the participants' narratives, which provided essential information and explanations that we were not intended to contest. Yet, by conducting layered analyses, we were able to expand and extend not only what was said but also what was interpreted through the photographs. In a sense, narratives and photographs worked together to provide rich written insights legitimately depicted by the visual data.

Although this study has centered around methods, our interpretations of the empirical data have implications for both policy makers and health care professionals. Some participant narratives and photographs demonstrate how important it is for the community to live together, safely in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, in the open air, where it is healthy to walk and grow vegetables and eat wholesome food. Yes, there is the hegemonic discourse advocating for paved roads, concrete walls and floors,

healthy living conditions in order to avoid insect-borne, incurable diseases. If living rurally —the way these communities have lived since ancestral times— is discouraged, even prevented, policy makers will need to anticipate and govern other spaces that people may legitimately inhabit and make it a sustainable plan for the residents – affordable healthy housing for all. There was significant pressure to check for insects, to spray regularly and to remodel their homes, but, without government funding, these plans were impractical.

In our article, we have analyzed the processes by which rural communities have been stigmatized as a result of the perception of poverty and unhealthy living. The social construction of this focus has been based on standards established by western modernity. This phenomenon entails economic principles which have constructed a specific structure in which the role of rural communities represents a lack of development. There, this article provides a useful perspective in comprehending insights about certain rural communities in southern Ecuador to address social and historical contexts that have shaped their social structure and ethnic identity. Healthcare practitioners need to be aware of the different cultural contexts that dictate how the dominant, western-based discourse and the discourse of the Others connect as well as collide. We noticed that departing from the needs of the community for the sake of prevention of Chagas disease was a challenge during the interventions in rural areas. The main objective of the scientific community at large —university researchers, health practitioners, government officials— and the rural residents is to look for joint solutions. It is key to create and establish a community conscience, a forum where to start the conversation and to negotiate a sense of true respect and mutuality. It is only then when effective, long-lasting changes may have a chance to succeed.

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